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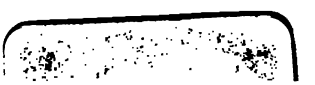

KNOWLEDGE, THE WING
WHEREWITH WE FLY TO HEAVEN

MARRIAGE

AND

MARRIED LIFE.

A Novel

FOR GIRLS ABOUT TO MARRY.

BY JSHA.

TWO VOLUMES

(*ONE GUINEA*).

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MARRIAGE, AND MARRIED LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

WHILE many writers of all ages and of all varieties have devoted their energies and talents to the description of love and its ultimatum, Marriage, and having landed their heroes and heroines in that desired haven, there leave them surrounded by the halo of an imaginary felicity, attainable in the eyes of an unmarried reader through no other experience, few, if any, have ventured to lay before the public, for whom they write, the ordinary trials which beset the most ordinary couples, and more often than not

cause marriage to be regarded by its members as the entrance into a state of far more trial than that from which the unmarried seek to escape *through* it.

Of *extraordinary* trials in marriage there is no lack of writers, but we venture to doubt whether the relation of these, be they founded on truth or fiction, ever worked either benefit or instruction to any reader of such unwholesome mental food, as, with few exceptions, we must consider all such revelations concerning the so-called "Holy Estate of Matrimony." And as the object of every writer *should* be, if it is not, the improvement of the world, so it appears to the one who now addresses it, a fit time to put before its rising generation, not the melodramatic tales founded on crime which create a most unhealthy interest in the youthful mind, but one founded on reality and of a nature to be experienced by such ordinary men and women as our parents were before us, and our children will be after us.

Two girls are sitting, when our story begins,

on a bank sloping from a terraced walk, in the grounds belonging to their father's rectory. Their ages nineteen and twenty, their relation to each other that of sisters, their appearance totally dissimilar, and their opinions equally so, as will be apparent to those who are admitted as audience to their conversation.

"How hateful it is," exclaimed one, the younger and fairer of the two, "to be shut up in this stupid hole, where we can see no one but the curates, and haven't a chance of amusing ourselves like other girls."

"What do you mean by that?" replied her sister. "I don't see that other girls lead such very much better or happier lives than we do, except that what they do; they do more in public, but it would not be any satisfaction to me personally to do this, so I am contented at present to stay where we are."

"I dare say you are," retorted her junior, "but you are not a fair judge of other girls, myself included. You have had as many offers as you care

for, and perhaps more, and although I know you are really not so good-looking as I am, I am quite aware that even those who admire *me* most like *you* best, and that you are pretty sure to marry whenever you wish it."

"Then is it to *get married* only that you are so anxious to leave 'this stupid hole.' I thought you despised such missishness," answered her elder sister, Adriana by name, but called Ada for convenience sake.

"And so I do. I detest it, and I *don't* wish to be married if I can get what I want without; but I am sick of this stupid life, where we do just the same things, at just the same hours, see just the same people, and talk just the same trash year after year, till I wish myself back at school again. At any rate, we did have *some* fun there."

Adriana regarded her sister doubtfully for a moment, as if uncertain what reply to make; then she said quietly and sadly, "*Trouble* finds us everywhere when we heed it, perhaps happi-

ness will do the same when God sees fit to let us have it."

"Happiness!" echoed a merry voice behind them. "Whoever heard of two girls sitting down to calculate their chances of happiness as if it was a matter of doubt, and what in the world are you both looking so dismal and cross for?"

The speaker was a bright-looking girl of sixteen, with lively dark eyes and glossy hair, many shades darker than that of either of the sisters already introduced to the reader. Her complexion was that of a thorough brunette, but it was entirely free from the sallow hue so frequent an accompaniment of dark skins, and was beautiful with the bloom of health and energy. She was tall for her age and very slight, giving, however, the impression of probable growth, at a later period, into a fine and well-proportioned woman. She was dressed as carelessly and unfashionably as was consistent with personal tidiness, and her whole appearance and bearing betokened a nature

wherein as yet neither care nor fear had found an entrance. Her cousins, for such they were, regarded her with equal interest, in answer to her speech, but with very different feelings.

Ada, as we also will call her, smiled at the accusation brought against herself and Almeria, and retorted jokingly, "You are an impertinent monkey to make such remarks on your elders," while her sister, looking with astonishment at the bright face above her, answered with all the dignity of her extra years—

"You talk like what you are, Eleanor, an inexperienced child. I hope *you* may be fortunate enough, at any rate, to find the happiness you make so sure of."

"Thank you, Allie; I have no doubt I shall secure a good portion, at any rate, and I certainly don't mean to lose what I *have* got, by sighing for what I have not. I can't think why *you* do," said Eleanor, slipping down the bank till she was on a level with the sisters.

"There you are quite mistaken," replied

Almeria rather scornfully. "I decline to allow that I have any real *happiness*, and whether this is so or not, no one can judge so well as myself; therefore I am not, as you suppose, losing what I *have*, while waiting for what I have *not*."

"Dear me," and "Hush, Allie," broke forth simultaneously from her two companions, mockingly from Eleanor, and reprovingly from Ada. But Almeria, once started on the subject of her grievances, was not to be turned by either ridicule or blame, from descanting on her many trials, and endeavouring to prove that not only were they real and tangible ones, but that she was by disposition and temperament peculiarly tried by trifles unheeded among beings of less sensitive composition.

Her companions heard her in silence, Ada sympathising in look where she felt it just and possible to do so; but Eleanor could not restrain her impatience, and not venturing to express it in words without encouragement from her elder cousin, vented it in various grimaces and kicks

which were wisely ignored by Almeria as beneath her notice to resent.

It is not my intention to lay before my readers a repetition of the complaints which the trio were engaged in considering; rather, I would leave them as, my story progresses, to observe their nature and number for themselves, and to draw their own conclusions concerning their reality and severity. But while my heroines are entertaining each other, and putting forth their respective views of that life which was dawning only as yet for each of them, I think it is time for me to explain more in detail their circumstances and surroundings.

To begin with the sisters, our first acquaintances, they were the motherless daughters of a good, kind old clergyman, concerning whom there is no need to trace more of his life than that portion which commenced with the death of his wife, an event which took place when Almeria was little more than an infant, and her sister a tiny child, whose only recollection

of her dead mother was associated with the gloom and stillness of a sick room.

They were the youngest of a family in which they had been preceded by three brothers, one only of whom had survived his mother, and he having chosen the army as his profession was consequently greatly removed from the society of his sisters, who worshipped him as only-brothers usually *are* worshipped, unless they disenchant their sisterly adorers by any remarkable want of brotherly affection. Gerald Harrington, however, was fully deserving of his sisters' good opinion and love; the only fault to be found with him, so far as they were concerned, being that he should have chosen a profession which separated him so much from them and their occupations and interests.

With him our story has so little to do that we may dismiss him from our thoughts for the present, turning them to our real heroine Eleanor Castleton, who was the only child of Mr. Harrington's only sister, a widow, concerning whom

there is little to be said except that she was Eleanor's mother, and as such contented herself with living for and in her child, nevertheless suffering her to go her own way, and mould her own life, as completely as if she herself were the inexperienced child, and Eleanor the woman who had passed through that experience which marriage only can explain of one of the greatest mysteries of our being, viz., the *true* relation of man and woman to each other.

It is marvellous to those who believe that life, with all its attendant mysteries, is given to us for a special purpose, which is ever the same in its object, and yet so infinitely varied in its ways of attaining it; I say, it is marvellous to such as believe this, to see others wandering aimlessly on through the same experiences which seem to themselves to have so forcible an aim in their application; passing unscathed through bitter trials, which make no impression when once the momentary suffering is gone; leaving behind them memories of conflict and danger, within and around their own souls and lives, and

emerging both from darkness into light, or again entering out of sunshine into the gloom of trouble, without laying to heart, either for their own benefit, or for the use of the young who follow them, any lesson from the training given them in these universal, but seldom understood, *Providential* dealings.

Mrs. Castleton was one of these unobservant and unteachable beings of whom I speak. Her life, which had been a stormy one, owing to an unsuitable and unhappy marriage, from which death had set *her* free in this world, and her equally to be pitied husband in the one beyond the grave, had made so little impression on her, that she was content to leave her child, on whom she nevertheless doted, to fight the battle of life in her own way, and as best she could, only bestirring herself occasionally to hope in a wondering and languid fashion, that her "dear Eleanor would be more fortunate than herself in married life:" but how to help her to ensure this desirable end, or to train her for her own share in *giving*, as well as *receiving* happiness, was as

great a mystery still to Mrs. Castleton as had been for years the fact of her own ill-success in pleasing her husband, and in emancipating herself from his perpetual tyranny and contempt.

While deeply thankful for her release when it came, she yet regarded the past as an unavoidable evil which she had had no power to alter or amend during its continuance; and satisfied in giving no intentional or aggressive cause for her husband's impatient ill-usage of her, it had never occurred to her that she was, notwithstanding, answerable in a great degree for the unhappiness of their married life, and that the irritable tyranny to which she was a daily victim, was but the unrestrained expression of the disappointment of her husband's hopes in her.

What these had been, and how they failed to be realised, we need not now seek to know, for it is with the younger heroine, and not with her mother, that our story deals; to her then let us return, and trace in her deeds and words the fruit of her bringing up, and the promise of her future.

CHAPTER II.

ELEANOR CASTLETON, although the principal heroine of my tale, is not the only one, and giving due precedence, as in duty bound, to age and priority of acquaintance, I will first give to my readers such knowledge of the circumstances and characters of Ada and Almeria Harrington as is needful to explain their sentiments already expressed, and to excite an interest in their future doings.

Ada had lived entirely at home, her father's companion and pupil. The loneliness of such a life must be experienced to be understood; for otherwise the world is apt to think that the daughter and father are equally to be commiserated, or envied, and this is far from true.

The man who has experienced all that life holds of devotion to himself, and his wishes and interests (as every good man *suitably* married acknowledges to have been his happy lot when the withdrawal of this devotion makes him for the first time conscious that he has been the object of silent but perpetual care from another), such a man is not competent to become in his turn the tender guide and sympathiser who is essential to the happiness of a young girl, and without whom the thoughtful, as well as the giddy, are nearly certain to wander from the path of worldly wisdom, which is in its degree as necessary for our well-being as we are assured is that higher law by which we learn to live as those who recognise the fact of a future and better existence.

Mr. Harrington was the kindest of men and most tender of fathers, but he had all his life been the object of the devotion of a mother first, and later on of a wife, and it never occurred to him that a girl's nature required any further out-

let for its affections than that which he had himself supplied to his children's mother, and his own; neither could he appreciate the fact of danger to their future happiness in the apparently safe shelter of the quiet home where he lived, as most men do, contentedly for himself really, but, according to his own *idea*, for his children.

And they equally with himself believed this, so that no thought of selfishness on their father's part had ever arisen to cool the love and respect which were Mr. Harrington's due reward for his unvaried outward kindness to his daughters. They knew no more than he, that he laid all his plans and arranged all theirs, as well as his own doings, to suit his own wishes and convenience; nor was he to be blamed for doing so. It was right (as it always is) that the will of the father, who loved and cared for those depending on him, should guide the actions and lives of those thus sheltered; but nevertheless, they suffered under this kind but selfish rule;

wherein was no element of womanly wisdom and motherly care for the young feelings which needed both; not only to train them rightly, but to shield them from such dangers as find us, in youth, as readily in the quiet of a secluded country life, as in the midst of the gay and unthinking whirl of our modern Babylon.

For want of this care and wisdom, Ada Harrington had learned early the bitter trial of disappointment in the hopes common to all young girls, and but for her own naturally patient and submissive temperament would doubtless have failed to gather from it the benefits always concealed among the apparent evils of deception and deluded expectations.

I have said that she was her father's companion, and pupil in a great degree, aided for three years of her life, from fifteen to eighteen, by an excellent and accomplished governess, and previously by one who eked out a scanty living by giving daily lessons in the village of Stretton, to the children of the few neighbouring gentry

who did not care for the expense or restraint of a resident teacher.

In Mrs. Hepworth, Ada had found a kind and judicious friend, but she was of too reserved and timid a nature to venture upon any more intimate discussions than arose out of the subjects upon which her pupils were being instructed by her, except on such occasions as permitted her to bring forward the Religious element: in these she proved herself a true guide and faithful companion to Ada and Almeria, supplying to them that knowledge of the nature of real Religion which even in the homes of our clergy is little understood, and not always practised, save in the outward forms and services demanded by the position of the father.

Mrs. Hepworth had known none of the ordinary disappointments and trials waiting so often on Love and Marriage. She had married early, the only man she had ever had a chance of caring for, who raised her from a state of dependence to one of comparative, but, as it

proved, only temporary importance in the social scale. Mr. Hepworth was killed by a fall from his horse six months after his marriage, and his income ceasing with his life, being derived almost solely from professional work, his widow was once more obliged to find among strangers the home denied to her in an independent position, and when Mr. Harrington, at the urgent entreaty of his daughters, engaged her as their governess, she had passed the age which would have given her sympathy with their youthful aspirations, had she been of a nature to feel and express it; and was simply the earnest, painstaking, submissive woman, whose heart was in the past, and whose hopes had no existence but in the longed-for moment of reunion with him who had given her all she had known of brightness and happiness in this world.

Yet Mrs. Hepworth was no discontented complainer, but a truly patient mourner, who, while unable to cast off her sorrowful remembrances, yet sought by single-minded performance of her duties to learn the lessons necessary for

the perfecting of her own character; nor did she ever fail to lead the minds of her young pupils in the same direction; but she could not teach what she herself had never learned, through personal experience of the ordinary mischances which so frequently befall the unwary in relation to what is called First Love, and the peculiar sorrows of her own married life made her shrink from any discussion bearing upon the subject of Love or Marriage; so that while Ada learned from her that Higher Wisdom which consoles and upholds us in suffering, she gained no warning for her own benefit, or insight into the necessity for caution in admitting into her own heart the thought of one who, while promising in appearance to bring her unusual chances of happiness, yet ended by teaching her, unintentionally, the truth she expressed to her sister, as we have heard in the last chapter. For Ada knew by experience that "trouble finds us everywhere;" and this is how she came by a knowledge which comes sooner or later to all.

CHAPTER III.

SOON after Mrs. Hepworth left the Rectory, an event which took place when Ada was eighteen, a friend of her brother Gerald's came to spend with him a portion of his leave. Much older than Gerald, he had yet formed a strong friendship for the young subaltern, whom he had saved by a timely warning from falling into the extravagant habits and dissipated career of one of their best brother officers as regarded his professional capacities, their worst as related to his moral nature and habits.

Gerald had sense enough to be grateful for Major Durnford's good offices towards himself, and in the excess of his friendship for one who

appeared so far beyond him in knowledge of the world and its dangers, urged him to find the change and rest made needful by a sharp attack of fever, in his father's pretty and comfortable rectory, where he privately hoped his sister Ada might impress his friend as favourably as he himself had been impressed by him, in consequence of his wise advice and friendly admonitions against the temptations spread for him by his less scrupulous companions.

Major Durnford, although so much senior to Gerald, was by no means either elderly or dull. On the contrary, he would have been a perfect companion for young and old alike, but for a peculiar restraint of manner which would suddenly appear at all times and under all circumstances, and give the impression of some hidden annoyance or anxiety which hindered him from yielding to his naturally bright disposition, and evident love of fun and pleasure.

He was tall, dark, and of singularly aristocratic appearance, quiet and reserved in manner to.

strangers, but full of pleasant humour and conversation where he felt at home and in congenial companionship—and at the Rectory it was impossible for him, or any one of similar nature, long to remain on the footing of a stranger.

Mr. Harrington, kind and easy to all, welcomed with pleasure a man old enough to command his acceptance of him as a companion, while he was young and handsome enough to ensure his being a no less welcome visitor to Ada, whose life just now was a very solitary one, Almeria being at school, whither that young lady had been dismissed for a reason to be explained hereafter.

Dearly as Mr. Harrington loved his daughters, he yet had no desire to see them grow old unmarried, and knowing that at his death he had comparatively little to leave them, he vaguely wished and intended that they should have such opportunities as seemed desirable to himself of obviating this necessity, but, so far as could be seen up to the present time, it had never occurred

to him that lovers, like time and tide, wait for no one's convenience, and that he could not introduce at his will a firebrand into his family in the shape of a pleasant and handsome man, without running a risk on which he had not calculated as near at hand, or likely to occur until he himself desired and sought it; and, as yet, Ada was too necessary to him for her father to have any present wish save that of retaining her with him.

When Gerald wrote for leave to bring home the man who had been so true a friend to him, Mr. Harrington gladly and unsuspiciously consented, rightly desiring to prove his own gratitude, and imagining Major Durnford not unnaturally to be of an age and character altogether unlikely to attract a young girl—or rather, this is what he *would* have imagined if he had given a thought to the subject. Moreover, he was so accustomed to the gentle obedience and quiet surrender of her will to his wishes, at all times, that he would not have feared the contrary should any diversity

of opinion arise between Ada and himself on a subject of such importance as her marriage.

With Gerald, then, arrived his friend, and during a month's stay it is not wonderful that, whether intentionally or not, Robert Durnford gained from Ada the strongest and purest love which a girl has to give, and one which she never gives but once.

I would not be supposed to mean that it is always to be desired that first love should prove also the last, or that no later attachment is worth having; still less, that the sentimental flirtations between young men and girls, founded on vanity and excited feelings, which occur perpetually, only weakening all power of true love, deserve in any sense the *name* even of love; but there is a real first love, founded on esteem and congeniality of thought and temperament, and fostered by the sense of sympathy, combined with tender protection and care, which Ada, and girls of her womanly nature, are only too ready to give for their own happiness, and which men too lightly

excite, from carelessness or vanity, not knowing either its value, or their own loss of respect as a race, when they teach a girl to be ashamed of her trust, and repentant of the extent of her attachment, although it may be known only to herself.

Such a love was that which Major Durnford won from Ada—first, by her regard before acquaintance for one who had shown himself, as she thought, worthy of all honour by his conduct with regard to her brother, and afterwards by his display in their intimate intercourse of all those manly elements of strength, judgment, respect for justice, and temperance in argument towards her male relations and occasional visitors, and to herself of a certain tender deference, and interest in all she said and did, which would have assured a more experienced girl than Ada that she was an object of more than ordinary admiration to him.

And truly this was so, for Ada was a girl to be loved far more than admired. She would have attracted little attention in a ball-room, but

in the quiet of home it was impossible not to observe that she had small, delicate features, a clear but very pale complexion, large and rather sad grey-blue eyes, and a mass of beautiful bright brown hair. She was not tall, but neither was she short, and although her face bore an expression of remarkable gentleness, there was about her mouth a look of resolution and firmness which showed that if gentle she was neither weak nor foolish.

Gerald watched silently and hopefully the apparently approaching fulfilment of his wishes regarding his friend and favourite sister, while Mr. Harrington observed nothing except that the former was a very agreeable visitor to himself, and that Ada appeared to be in better spirits than she had been since Mrs. Hepworth had left her, and Almeria also had been separated from her for the sake of those advantages supposed to be found at school, but unattainable at home, where that home is in the retirement of a country village.

So, unobserved, except by Gerald's brotherly and sympathising eyes, the two grew closer together in that freedom of intercourse which permitted the discussion of many subjects, and interchange of many ideas, not unusually forming a part of the idle talk of would-be lovers, but which made our present hero and heroine far more dangerous to each other than any of the false sentiments which spring from excited fancy or personal admiration, and die when these fade in the light of common sense and every-day habit.

Still, Robert Durnford made no sign and spoke no word which could assure the fact of his love being given to Ada as a reality, plainly as he showed it by voice and look to her brother, and by signs without number, but equally without tangibility to herself. Ada herself desired, however, nothing more, and to a girl of her innocent and unspoiled nature there is always a greater charm in love conveyed by implication, and asking no open return, therefore, than in the more vehement but more selfish expression of professed

love, which seeks as much as it gives. To Ada, therefore, the silent conviction conveyed by Robert Durnford's manner that he loved her, was all she required for any length of time that he might see fit to withhold any further or more open avowal of his feelings.

So the days passed on until the one before that on which Gerald and his friend were obliged to rejoin their regiment. As I have already said, there was observable at all times in Major Durnford's manner a certain restraint and sudden cloud over his brightest and happiest moments, which Ada had attributed, in the tenderness of her own feelings towards him, to some grief in his former life, for which she longed to comfort him, and which, instead of exciting in her mind any suspicions of his good faith towards herself, only increased her interest in him, as one who had been ennobled by the experience of sorrow, and who was, therefore, all the more qualified to be a stay and support to her own more inexperienced nature.

But her awakening was at hand, and was innocently brought about by her brother, who, after the retirement of the general household, proposed to her to join himself and his friend on the terrace walk which surrounded the Rectory, and bear them company while they smoked together their last evening "weed."

Very willingly Ada complied, for while she was tormented with no doubt of Major Durnford's return, she yet craved for every moment of his presence while he was still under her father's roof; so, wrapping a shawl round her, she followed her brother out into the sweet but silent air of a September night. Long and somewhat silently the three paced up and down, when, suddenly, Gerald, exclaiming abruptly that he had business with his father, and bidding Ada wait for his return to wish her good-night, disappeared into the house, leaving her and Major Durnford to continue their walk alone.

A moment's silence succeeded to his departure, then Ada, notwithstanding her brother's injunc-

tion, turned to her companion to bid him farewell till the morning, when, to her surprise and alarm, she perceived by the light which fell full on his face as they stood opposite the lighted room from which they had stepped on to the terrace, that he was very pale, and his features disturbed by an agitation totally at variance with their usual calm and resolute expression.

"Miss Harrington," he began hurriedly; then checking himself, he looked at her with yearning but doubtful eyes, and with so painful yet hesitating an expression that Ada saw at a glance he had some communication to make to her of a nature which he wished, yet feared, to disclose. Young as she was she had a full share of that presence of mind which an instinctive sense of something wrong provides as a defence in the otherwise defenceless, and while her heart beat with sudden fear the consequence of her companion's changed look and agitated manner, she said, quietly—

"You have something to tell me, what is it?"

With something like a groan Major Durnford took her hand and drew her a few steps aside from the tell-tale light, then turning from her as he spoke, he said, with a trembling and hesitating voice—

"I do not know if I am right or wrong in what I am about to tell you. God knows I wish to do the former, but I cannot see what it is. I only know that I am miserable myself, and fear lest I have made you think too much of my unworthy self, and with more interest than I deserve."

Here Ada withdrew her hand gently, but decidedly, and in a low, quick voice said—

"Major Durnford, I do not understand you. Tell me plainly what you mean, and why you fear to have made me think of you as you do not deserve."

"Ada," cried her companion, "I must for my own sake, if not for your's, tell you before I go what I never thought to speak of to you, and what," he added in a lower voice, "I am, I believe, a fool for doing so; but I must go on,

having once begun. You know well enough," he went on, "that I love you, although I have not dared to tell you so, and I do so now (and here he again took the hand which was suffered to remain quietly in his) because I owe it to you to acknowledge it; forgive me for saying it. I cannot but believe that if I go away, leaving you with your present impression of me, you will expect and, perhaps, hope to see me return at some future day; and, Ada, I must not do so unless, when you know all, you yourself bid me leave all else for your dear sake."

Ada listened to him as in a dream—she neither moved nor spoke, only looking up at him, with a dumb entreaty in her sad and frightened eyes, for an explanation of his meaning. At last, after a desperate and successful effort to overcome his excessive agitation, Major Durnford continued—

"You have treated me as an honoured guest, and I have returned it by suffering you to regard me as what I am not. I love you, dear, as I

never have loved and never shall love another woman, but I am not free to do so, and I have sinned against you and your innocent girlhood in suffering you to see my love, and to show me that you would accept it if I might offer it. But truth compels me before I leave you to tell it you, and to deceive you no longer, though I call Heaven to witness, I never thought to have done so; and when you know that I am bound in honour to marry another woman you will learn to despise the man who had been weak enough to bind himself where he did not love, and to love where he could not marry."

As he spoke he released Ada's hand, and uttering a deep sigh, turned from her, and walked rapidly away to a gate at the far end of the terrace, where he stood fighting with the powers of evil against the temptation to throw aside every tie of honour, and to forget every obligation but the one which he felt himself to have incurred towards the young and innocent girl whom he had taught to love and trust him. But

he little knew Ada, in supposing for an instant that she would have accepted a love to which she had no right. Slowly she shook off a sensation of dull hopelessness, for she recognised at once that it behoved her for her own sake, and still more for the sake of the man who had yielded so weakly to temptation, to resist its contagion to the utmost, and to send him from her as little hindered as might be from the fulfilment of his duty to another woman.

She therefore approached Major Durnford with more than her ordinary step of resolution and firmness, and gently touching his arm, said in a voice whose sincerity he could not doubt—

"Forget the past, as I will, and be comforted; you have not hurt me as you think. I do not blame you, for I am not your judge, and cannot see your motives. I shall think of you still as my brother's best friend, and," she added, "as such I shall pray that you may be led aright—myself also."

Here her voice failed. She waited an instant

for a reply, but none came, until as she turned to leave him Major Durnford suddenly seized the hand yet lingering where she had first laid it on addressing him, and bending his head down, covered it with his kisses, and the tears which even the bravest and strongest man need not scorn to shed, when caused by penitence and worthy, but disappointed love. In one moment, Ada's strength seemed like to fail her. She loved this man; led to do so by all pure and right motives, knowing nothing of the barrier between them; and her heart rose up against the bitter pain of feeling that she had and could have no part in his life of love; but she had not learned in vain the lessons of submission to a Higher Will than her own from her patient friend and governess, and with a sudden but gentle movement withdrew her hand from Major Durnford's touch, and herself from his reach.

"Wish me good-bye," she said faintly. "Gerald will be coming back, and I cannot see him now."

"Until we meet again, wherever that may be, you and your unselfish goodness shall stand between me and sin," he replied gravely, and with a certain solemnity of manner, which gave to Ada's wounded feelings the only comfort possible from him to her, for they assured her that he respected even more than he loved her, and without this assurance the result of the last few weeks would have been unendurable to her. As he finished speaking, she bent forward, and laying her hands in both of his for an instant, said earnestly—

"Let me think so, and I shall not be unhappy;" and the next minute she had entered the house, meeting at the open window her brother, who, having finished his discussion with his father, was coming to rejoin her and his friend.

"Why," said he, as Ada in her haste had nearly overset him, "you are in a hurry, old lady —what is up?"

"Nothing, dear," replied his sister; "but like yourself just now, I have some business indoors,

and it is late, so kiss me, dear boy, and let us say good-bye, for it will be too early to-morrow in starting for me to see you again."

Her brother, though vexed at the abrupt farewell, and at her decision against rising in time to see him off the next morning, was yet so misled by her calmness of speech that it did not occur to him to suspect that anything had arisen to disturb the progress of the attachment which he fully believed to be growing between his friend and his sister, but which he concluded had not yet arrived at the point of a mutual understanding.

Whether his friend enlightened him on the subject is not for the reader to know, as we follow the two no further, returning to my poor young heroine; but how it fared with her when left to face her hard experience without the sustaining excitement of necessary and immediate action, I must leave for another chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE first sorrow" has found many among its sentimental and inexperienced admirers who invest it, by unreal descriptions, with a romantic interest and attractive melancholy most false in reality and therefore most hurtful in its effect on those who judge of the actual thing from such delusive representations.

There are doubtless events in every young life which thwart the natural desires to such an extent as to amount to a passing appreciation of sorrow in the minds of those who have never known its reality, but it is not such wholesome though disagreeable checks as these which deserve our sympathy or merit in any degree the title which

is pre-eminently the sign of our brother and sisterhood with all those who have suffered for the sake of right, and who alone can lay claim to the dignity of bearing a portion of the cross borne for them by the "Man of Sorrows."

While Ada was sustained by necessity for exertion and concealment, she was unaware of the whole meaning and weight of that which had befallen her, and although sleep visited her only by fits and starts during the night which preceded the departure of her brother and Major Durnford, no tears as yet for her own disappointed hopes had relieved her excited brain, or disturbed her natural calmness.

She rose as she had retired, like one in a dream, who has a consciousness that something is wrong, but a still clearer conviction that if he can only pursue his vision to the end, he will find everything set right. With the morning came some such hope to Ada, and although she had determined not to repeat the farewells she had already said the night before, her heart died within her

when she heard the receding wheels of the dog-cart which was to convey Gerald and his friend to the station.

Hastily dressing, for she felt it impossible to remain in her room until their usual late hour of breakfast, Mr. Harrington being no lover of early rising, she went downstairs, intending to leave the house, and passing through the hall for that purpose, she perceived, lying on the table close to which she must turn in reaching a little glass door opening into the garden, a letter addressed to herself, and evidently placed there by some person acquainted with the house and the ways of its inhabitants; for it was Ada's custom to go out at this door every morning before her father descended to breakfast and gather a few flowers to place beside his plate. She knew at once, therefore, that her correspondent had trusted that, as usual, she would be the first to pass the table on which he had laid his letter, and needed not to open it to ascertain from whom it came.

Distrusting, however, her own powers of concealment from her father's observation of her changed state of feeling, she put the envelope in her pocket, nor did she open it until again at night she found herself alone, with sufficient time before her to feel that she might safely indulge the outbreak of grief which had gradually grown during the long hours of the past day, from a dreamy state of undefined sorrow to a clear sense of all she had lately been learning to hope for, and which she had helped, by her own decisive words and actions the night before, to put from her without prospect of return.

It may seem strange that so young a girl should have been able to restrain so entirely all curiosity regarding the letter, which doubtless contained an explanation of the facts simply stated by Major Durnford of his previous entanglement with another woman; but Ada's position involved many necessities for self-sacrifice and self-restraint unknown to girls who have the happier freedom of a home shielded by a

mother's presence and influence from too early an acquaintance with the small trials of a woman's life; and her father's requirements, though made in all good faith in his tastes and pursuits being equally congenial to her, involved the perpetual repression of all girlish habits and selfishness, and enabled her, therefore, to bear with patience the present hindrance to the free indulgence both of her curiosity and her sorrow.

Unobservant as Mr. Harrington usually was in little things, he did remark his daughter's paler looks, for pale she always was, and her depression of manner, but feeling the loss himself of the society of his son and guest, it appeared no matter of surprise to him that Ada should do likewise; therefore suggesting that a drive to the neighbouring Cathedral city would pass away, for both, the first day of their return to their ordinary lonely life, he ordered the only vehicle to be obtained in the little village of which he was rector, and the day was spent in shopping and visiting, which, hard as it was to Ada to get

through, was yet preferable to a long dreary day of repressed sorrow, with her father's attention undistracted from her.

But at length, when he had dismissed her with his usual blessing and kind good-night—for Mr. Harrington never failed in outward expressions of love towards his daughter, however much he might unconsciously require of self-denial at her hands from force of habit—and when her door was locked, concealing her from all sight but that of the Unseen, she opened the letter left by Major Durnford, and read as follows:—

"I know not how to address you, for while it is true that I have suffered you to become dearer to me than any other being, I know you cannot give me the right to call you so, since I have confessed my bondage to another woman. Why or how this has come about is of little use to dilate on now, but I am not wholly to blame, and of her who thus holds me by the tie of honour, I will only say that she and others like her need to

remind us that they are of the same kind with those who are worthy, as you are, of a man's reverence as well as love. Hitherto I have despised women for the sake of one who had secured me and what I could give her of this world's goods, and it is not little, by artifices and pretexts unknown to your purer nature. Henceforth I will regard with reverence for your sake the sex which you have taught me contains the extreme of strength, as formerly I have learned its weakness. I do not pretend to be guided by any religious feeling in determining at all costs to myself to keep my promise to the woman who has secured it. It is solely and entirely a sense of honour which makes me thus resolve, and my punishment for my folly is to know that you must suffer also. Yet it may comfort you to know that I who have not prayed for years, have done so now, not for myself—I do not believe in prayer for myself—but for your sake I have prayed and will still, that you may be blessed and comforted, if there is in this world any justice or

mercy. You are too young to grieve long for the loss of one who has shown you too much of his weakness and worldliness to be really loved by so pure a heart as yours; but when you have forgotten the pain he caused you, do not forget the name or regard of, your's too devotedly,

"ROBERT DURNFORD."

Ada mechanically read and replaced the letter in its envelope, then with a sudden burst of grief she flung herself on her knees before the couch where she was accustomed to make her daily prayers, and burying her face in the cushions, sobbed as if her heart were broken. All night she knelt; and through the weary hours the fierce battle between longing love and dutiful submission to right raged without abatement. No words escaped her lips but those so often spoken without the sense of need; now so despairing a cry from a bruised and broken spirit—"Lord, have mercy" was the burthen of her prayer. She cared not how or when; she knew only that her life was

changed, and that God's law had put from her the happiness and love she craved for, and yet which she had rejected on the only terms possible to her, and she cried blindly to Him in her great need for the help no other could give her.

Again and again the storm of grief swept over her, but at last, when morning had fully dawned and the household began to rouse to the duties of another day, Ada was conscious of the worst being over, and as she rose exhausted from her knees, she yet knew that although for the present happiness and the brightness of life had fled, she had a strength of purpose and a certainty of resignation to the inevitable which was in itself —Peace after storm.

Could any sentimental delineator, either by pen or pencil, of life's sorrows, have seen the poor girl in this, her first experience of them, they would have perceived little in her appearance to teach the sentiment that such realities are interesting or romantic from any point of view. True feeling of any severe or strong nature is not cal-

culated to beautify the person suffering from it, although it is quite possible that something having a fictitious resemblance to the real thing may exercise a refining and therefore beautifying influence on an otherwise uninteresting face. But it was within, and not outwardly, that the chisel of trouble was modelling Ada into a more perfect imitation of the great Master, and when she regarded the tear-stained cheeks and swollen eyes which told so plainly of the night's distress, she was both horrified and frightened. "What in the world," was her first thought, "will papa say? and how can I account to him for my dreadful looks?"

The next moment, however, she remembered, to her great relief, that her father was to start immediately after breakfast for a meeting of his brother clergy, which would occupy him the better part of the day; an excuse, therefore, on the plea of headache from joining him before he left home, which was as true as it was convenient, saved Ada from facing her father's

observation until she had effaced by rest and care the chief traces of the mental conflict in which she had been engaged. During the long solitary day she had time to form still more clearly to herself the plan of her future life for the present. Outwardly it would remain the same, but to herself, its youthful charms and hopeful visions were departed.

She was not foolish enough to imagine that all happiness had fled with the disappointment of her hopes, but she knew that for some years it would be impossible for her to look forward, as girlhood always does, to the possible changes and fuller life which womanhood may bring to all, and does bring to most; and she felt that while her present life had been rendered dreary and uninteresting, as it had never been before, it was yet her only source either of consolation or peace.

Yes, Ada was right; for whatever the world may preach about the necessity of distracting us from useless sorrow and unavailing regret by

means of its pleasures and amusements, and powerful as these may be, where sorrow and regret are the consequences of folly and vanity, they are powerless as healers of a heart wounded by afflictions, not of its own seeking, for these, which are of the nature of that fiery trial by which we shall all, sooner or later, be purified and perfected, are only to be soothed, not by selfish absorption of another kind, but by the unselfish exercise of devotion towards others. So Ada, who had hitherto been a loving and dutiful child, from natural mildness of disposition, and a willing helper in her father's work among his people, from a sense of duty to him and her position, perceived that if she would retain her self-respect and interest in life, she must now make objects of these things which, as yet, had been to her dry and necessary duties of her daily life. And now, not being permitted to live for the one she would willingly have devoted her life to, and feeling all the repulsion of a truly womanly nature, from the idea of living to herself, and

nursing, not only a selfish but even (probably) a sinful love, she resolved to make her father and the work of his widely-spread parish her chief object and interest, while it was apparent, as it was so plainly at present, that there was no other place in the world for her and her many capabilities of giving and receiving happiness.

When, then, Mr. Harrington returned, Ada was ready to meet him with more than her usual interest in all he had to tell, and if he observed her weary looks and heavy eyes, they were fully accounted for by the headache which had been her safeguard from prying eyes of domestic curiosity during the day, as well as from the fatherly and unsuspecting enquiries of the good Rector. And here, for the present, we leave him and his eldest daughter, only assuring the reader that the latter did not fail in her resolve, notwithstanding its many difficulties and frequent wearinesses. Often, it is true, she had need to cry in her inmost heart, "Lord, help me," but this being a sincere desire on her part,

and not only a despairing complaint, it was not unanswered, and day by day peace grew in the young but burthened heart, deprived by circumstances and a natural reserve of sympathy or human help.

Her father, always kind and indulgent where his own wishes were not hindered, willingly acceded to her evident and increasing interest in the management and work of the usual routine of a parish, and thus it happened that Almeria returned from her school life to find her father and sister contented in the everyday duties of a thorough country life, varied only by the small gaieties which are to be found in such localities as the village of ——, and the neighbouring cathedral town of ——.

We must return now to the cause of Almeria's banishment to school life, which took place when she was fifteen, and just one year before Mrs. Hepworth resigned her post as governess in Mr. Harrington's household. The truth was that this poor lady was as unfit to cope with the wilful

and rebellious spirit of the younger, as she was well suited for the guidance and companionship of the more teachable elder sister, and the frequent outbreaks of disobedience on the part of Almeria, to which she treated Mrs. Hepworth, at last induced the latter to refuse any longer to remain; but Ada, being equally unwilling to lose her assistance, it was, after much discussion, decided, to her own great delight, that Almeria should be sent to school; Mrs. Hepworth remaining another year at the Rectory. Thus it happened that the latter and her remaining pupil were brought into more intimate connection than always occurs between a governess and her charge, and notwithstanding the reserve of the former, and want of worldly experience, her practical example of patient acceptance of sorrow was not lost on the latter, and was the one earthly support given to her when her own hopes were overthrown.

In Almeria's school life we have no special interest. I will, therefore, describe her as she

appeared at eighteen, a year before my story commences, and give the reader some clue to the meaning of the complaints and statements which she was giving vent to when first introduced to notice.

She was a decided beauty, but unfortunately equally decidedly aware of her advantages in this respect, and determined to make the most of them. In figure she was tall and finely formed, being already as matured in appearance as most girls a year or two older. Her hair, though not so abundant as her sister's, was of a lovely golden shade, many degrees fairer than Ada's, while her eyes were of the darkest hazel. In complexion she combined the delicacy of a blonde with the bloom of a brunette; and her features being good and regular, she was not mistaken in her high opinion of her own beauty, or altogether unreasonable in her hope of being raised by it to a sphere of life far beyond that in which she was born, and which she despised and disliked, with all the folly of

inexperienced youth, and all the discontent of a spoiled and ill-regulated childhood. For Almeria had been her father's darling and the tyrannical pet of the whole household, until as she grew old enough to interfere, by her own imperious will and temper, with the indolent but selfish pleasure of her father in her outward perfections, and to excite in his mind a fear that she would reject, until too late, the restraints and education necessary to her position as a lady, he was induced to accede to the banishment from his home for a time of his unruly young daughter, in the hope that school discipline would correct his own too fond and foolish indulgence.

Whether it did so in any degree beyond that of enforcing restraint on the external conduct of Almeria, is very doubtful. She always had ruled her father, and she meant to do so still, but she had learned to conceal her intentions, and to insist on her will in a different and more womanly fashion.

For Ada she had a sincere love, but her in-

domitable pride would never suffer her to own a fault or accept a sisterly hint, however gently given, and Ada's reserve on the subject of her own bitter experience justified Almeria, perhaps, in believing that she knew less of real life than she herself had learnt in the little world of school, and in pitying her as a poor-spirited, incomprehensible despiser of all which seemed to herself most desirable in life.

Knowing, as before hinted, that even in her quiet home Ada had not lacked unusual opportunities of marriage, as regarded numbers, though by no means quality or wealth in her suitors, she could not understand either the attraction she exercised for men, or her own complete indifference to and rejection of their advances, but we, who know more than Almeria of her sister's past, may conclude rightly that it was the womanly, unselfish spirit and meek temper which, having led her to renounce all most dear for the sake of right, displayed itself unknowingly to her in her expression and manner, and drew towards her the love of men,

who seek pre-eminently in woman the qualities that tend to rest, and freedom from worrying anxiety, which latter they like also to claim as their own special prerogative.

While, however, Almeria freely expended her pity on her more appreciated but less beautiful sister, she secretly envied both her powers of attraction, and carelessness on account of them; but being, as I have already said, too proud to learn wisdom from any less severe teacher than personal experience, she contented herself with the determination to take the first eligible opportunity of releasing herself from a state of existence wearying to her in the extreme, and in which she found no scope for her own special talents, or for the display of her remarkable beauty.

For it is not to be supposed that her father's curate counted for anything in the eyes of Almeria as a possible husband for herself. She would have scouted the very idea of such a thing: nevertheless she would have been willing enough to encourage aspirations which she never

meant to realise, however humble the position of her admirers, had any such presented themselves —but none did. Whether the few male scions of the neighbouring houses were over-awed by her beauty or by the air of haughty superiority which was her natural manner, or whether they shrank from laying themselves and their small possessions and expectations at the feet of the discontented-looking but lovely girl, lest they should meet with ignominious defeat, certain it is that no lover had ever offered to Almeria that chance of excitement which would have been welcome to her in the weariness of her quiet country life, and which can always be got out of an attachment, however contemptible the lover may be, by the class of girls to whom Almeria mentally belonged. Failing excitement of this kind, she consoled herself by the belief that no one understood her, or was consequently fit to approach her with feelings of admiration and love, which were natural enough in the case of ordinary girls.

CHAPTER V.

AT the time when our story commenced Eleanor Castleton and her mother were staying with the inhabitants of the Rectory, and the conversation related between the three girls took place the day before the return of the Castletons to their home at Chilham, a country town near the sea coast, where Eleanor was being educated under the auspices of a clergyman's widow, Mrs. Monckton by name, who was well worthy of the trust reposed in her by the parents of the girls put under her care. Eleanor was herself only a day boarder in Mrs. Monckton's establishment, but being a great favourite with that lady she constantly made opportunities for seeing and conversing with her young pupil

at times when both were free from the restraining atmosphere of the schoolroom and lesson time.

Mrs. Monckton was a young woman still, of bright and energetic character: as great a contrast as could well be to Eleanor's weak but querulous mother: for, strange to say, as soon as the weight of her husband's tyranny was withdrawn, the relief she experienced seemed to find its most frequent expression in a milder form of the same irritability which had made their home anything but what it should be, or what Mrs. Castleton had fondly but vainly hoped for in her younger days of married life. To Eleanor alone, her mother never failed in tenderness, and her irritability was displayed to her only in fretful complaints of small ailments and petty annoyances.

We left our three heroines discussing their various views of life and happiness, and having now been introduced to their previous history, we will return, and hear the end of the conversation.

interrupted by the necessity of retrospection for the reader's benefit.

Almeria had talked herself into a state of sentimental self-commiseration, and her hearers into one, respectively of contemptuous scorn, and silent wonder, when the steps of approaching visitors were heard on the terrace walk immediately above where they were sitting, by which they knew that the intruders must have passed through the house and out of the drawing-room windows to search for the missing hostesses. Ada rose instantly to meet and welcome her supposed guests, whoever they might be. Almeria did not offer to stir from her seat, and Eleanor rolled down the bank and disappeared round a corner like a hunted rabbit.

"Ah, my dears," said the plaintive voice of Mrs. Castleton, who now came in view, accompanied by an elderly lady and a young man, both strangers to Ada, "I thought I should find you here. I would not send for you, because servants are so stupid at explaining, and I thought you

might wonder at my disturbing you for old friends of my own, but who are strangers to you. Lady Mowbray, however, expressed so great a desire to see my nieces as well as my daughter, that I brought her and Sir John out with me to look for you all."

And as she mentioned their respective names, Mrs. Castleton made a gesture of introduction towards Ada, who responded to it in her usual quiet and gentle fashion. Almeria, who had remained seated, almost with her back to the party, could not for very shame alter the position she had chosen to retain when Mrs. Castleton first addressed her and her sister; but at the mention of names strange to her ears, and therefore promising a chance of variety and excitement, she began to regret her hasty compliance with her own selfish laziness, instead of with the effort which politeness would have obliged her to make, in her joint position with Ada, as hostess in her father's house. The latter, therefore, being the only recipient of her aunt's explana-

tions, alone replied with assurances of pleasure in the meeting, and of her hope that the strangers would remain for the universal five o'clock tea, nowhere more diligently enjoyed than in this quiet, out-of-the-world rectory.

To this they assented, or rather the lady did so, her son being occupied in glancing curiously at Almeria, whose profile, although she was seated much below where they were standing, was plainly seen, and to very great advantage.

Mrs. Castleton now began to make diligent enquiry for her missing Eleanor, and calling to Almeria to know if she could reveal her cousin's whereabouts, gave her the opportunity she was beginning to desire, of rising for the purpose of joining the group on the terrace above her. As she hesitated for a moment whether to climb up the sloping ascent in her usual girlish fashion, or to walk a few steps further, to the properly cut means of reaching the top of the bank without fear of an undignified slip, Sir John put out his hand, begging to be allowed to assist her

from where she stood; and this little incident placed the two at once on terms of more comfortable acquaintance than any amount of formal introductions would have done. They thereupon turned also to follow Ada and Lady Mowbray to the house, Mrs. Castleton having disappeared in search of the truant Eleanor, with whom she returned, a few minutes after her nieces and guests had reached the drawing-room, and whom she triumphantly presented to her friend, apologising, notwithstanding, for her somewhat battered condition as regarded her appearance externally, remarking that she was still but a child, and had a child's dislike to the restraint imposed by attention to dress, &c., &c.

"All the better, my dear Maria," exclaimed Lady Mowbray; "it is quite a relief now-a-days, to meet with a young girl who has any room in her head for thoughts unconnected with fashions. If I had a daughter I should let her despise dress and all its follies as long as she would."

And here Lady Mowbray gazed admiringly at Eleanor's blooming young face, and exchanged a meaning look with her friend; then taking Eleanor's hand in her's, she called to her son, who was still engrossed with Almeria, and bade him come and make acquaintance with her old schoolfellow's child. He complied with the alacrity of politeness, and addressed a few remarks to her as she stood by his mother, but it was evident that he hardly saw her, and a very few minutes found him again by Almeria's side. As to Eleanor, she was delighted with Lady Mowbray for her wise remark (as it appeared to her) on the subject of dress, and the contempt due to it; puzzled by the look which her sharp eyes had detected between the two mothers, and amused at the evident distraction of Sir John's attention when speaking to her; and the (to her) equally evident annoyance of Almeria at losing an unusually interesting half hour, or any portion of it, for the sake of so insignificant a person as her young cousin.

Meanwhile Ada was presiding over the tea-table, and the Rector coming in at the window on his return from his usual afternoon's round, we may explain to the reader, while Mrs. Castleton does so to him, who her friends were, and how they happened to find her, and to call on her at her brother's house.

Lady Mowbray and Mrs. Castleton had been schoolfellows, and had formed a real and lasting attachment to each other, which had continued —sustained by correspondence chiefly—during the married life of both up to the present time. In their experience of marriage their paths had been far apart, Lady Mowbray having tyrannised over her husband as completely—although less apparently to others—as Mr. Castleton had ruled his wife to her misery, and his own consequent discomfort. Since the death of this latter gentleman his widow had accepted more than one invitation to her friend's home, where, during her son's minority, Lady Mowbray exercised her native talents for reigning, on such of

the tenants and retainers on his estate as, unfortunately for themselves, fell within her reach and jurisdiction. Not that she was either harsh or unkind, but she was eminently *exigéante*, and while very vague in its meaning to those who have never suffered under such a disposition, this word conveys to those who *have* been so unfortunate, an idea of domestic discomfort of a variety and depth unappreciable by the uninitiated, incapable of explanation, but terrific in its significance, and the powerlessness of its victims to emancipate themselves, or even to secure the solace which the sympathy of happier friends can sometimes, although not very beneficially, afford. The lady herself, however, lived in the delusion that she was amiability and kindness itself, inasmuch as she not only wished all around and belonging to her to be happy and prosperous, but exerted herself actively to ensure this, and was frequently called on to endure much private disappointment in consequence of the ingratitude which was occasionally evinced

by a restive recipient of her bounty, in whom, unfortunately for him or her self, the spirit of independence proved too strong for that of prudence. Naturally Lady Mowbray withdrew with an air of suffering, but righteous, angered benevolence from people so incapable of discerning when they were well off, and although no one of these ever ventured to solicit a renewal of her kind offices, she of course fully recognised the certainty that they would live to regret their want of thankfulness for her former supervision of their interests, and to realise their loss when it was withdrawn.

Sir John Mowbray's father made a very short resistance to the fate he speedily found prepared for him in marriage. But, although he wisely succumbed to the inevitable, and husbanded his faculties and strength for the demands made upon him by the spoiled and affected beauty he had made his wife, he soon broke down under the petty worries, daily fidgetings, and incessant lamentations and dissertations—the first over her

own grievances, and the latter on what was due to her from others—delivered to and at him by his wife; and falling into ill-health—the very usual accompaniment of depressed spirits—died of an attack of bilious fever when his son was fifteen years of age, to the real grief of his unconscious tormentor, who loved her meek and openly devoted husband, as much as she could care for anything beyond her own self-importance, and fondly believed, to the last day of her life, that he had enjoyed the days of his slavery as thoroughly as she had realised the pleasure of possessing a devoted slave, and that he was impatiently waiting for a renewal of his bonds, in some region devoted to the memory of broken earthly ties, where his dearest hope was that of her arrival on the scene for the purpose of claiming him again as her special property.

The present Baronet knew comparatively little of his mother's peculiarities, having been sent early to a public school, then to a private tutor, and college life was succeeded by a prolonged

tour abroad; so that he accepted, with tolerable faith so far, her creed concerning herself, which was to the effect that she was a person of acute sensibilities, who must be shielded consequently from everything painful and disagreeable; also that she possessed a delicacy of constitution to which opposition was highly injurious, causing severe and distressing symptoms, called by some high-sounding name, which the young man did not understand, and consequently revered as a formidable complaint, not to be lightly spoken of, but which to Lady Mowbray's maid, and to Sir John's lamented father, had borne a close resemblance to that peculiar affection which, in unrestrained female natures, is called hysterics, and consists of very loud sobbing, with violent gesticulation of no especial significance, followed by a state of depression bordering on what, in any one else, would have been worthily expressed as "the sulks." Furthermore, his mother had taught herself, as well as her son, to believe that she lived for the good and advantage of

others, desiring nothing so much as to add, by her advice and assistance, to the well-being and improvement of those who were by any circumstances placed under her influence; and, if sighs and groans over the depravity of human nature were to be depended on, Lady Mowbray really did suffer very acutely from the misdeeds of her friends and neighbours; but as her son, luckily for his peace of mind, had never yet heard the style in which she administered good advice, or felt the oppressiveness of her method of conferring assistance which *she* thought advisable in her neighbours' affairs, but upon which they were ignorant enough sometimes to think otherwise, he was not a fair judge between her and the ungrateful world, and only wondered why people could not take kindness as it was meant, wishing, at the same time, that his mother would be less dismal in her conversation, and trouble herself less about other people's sins and shortcomings.

Although Mrs. Castleton had twice been Lady

Mowbray's visitor since her own widowhood, on neither occasion had she taken Eleanor with her, or made acquaintance with the young Baronet; but the two mothers had somehow arrived at a tacit understanding that if these young people should fortunately take a fancy to each other in years to come, it would be a very good and desirable thing; the respective reasons in the minds of each for such a desire, being as follows. Mrs. Castleton had listened, with mingled envy and admiration, to her friend's account of the devotion she had experienced in her married life, and having no idea of anything beyond the patent fact that some men are good and kind husbands, while others are bad and disagreeable ones—like her own—she suffered herself to hope, in this case, that Sir John would most likely inherit his father's amiable tendencies in this respect, and, if so, and if, further, he and Eleanor should marry, why, then she, poor woman, felt that she could forget and forgive all she had suffered herself in the comfort of beholding her child

adored, as Lady Mowbray assured her—with many sighs and tears—had been her happy lot.

That lady, however, had arrived at the same conclusion as her less fortunate friend regarding the desirableness of her son's marriage with Eleanor, by a somewhat different line of argument. She had never had a daughter on whom to exercise all the power of which she was meekly conscious, as a gift to be used for the good of others, in training them not so much in the way in which they *should* go, as in the way *she thought* they should, and while speculating sometimes on her probable chances in the future in the shape of grandchildren, as specimens on whom she might practise by right, it would occasionally dawn with unpleasant suggestiveness on her mind, that she must not only submit to the existence first of a daughter-in-law, but that this same daughter-in-law might prove a stumblingblock in her path, and hinder her from doing all that good to the next generation which she felt it her special mission to force on those who were too

young, like some of her older and more stubborn victims, to refuse the benefits she desired to pour on their inexperienced heads. When, therefore, she beheld the weak-minded woman into whom her former merry school friend had degenerated, and heard her pitiful tale of wasted love and blighted hope, there instantly occurred to her mind the same fallacious hope, though time had not then proved it, that Eleanor would of course resemble her mother, and if so what, thought Lady Mowbray, could be more easy and delightful than to train her to be the very daughter-in-law she required? She felt pretty sure that Mrs. Castleton had never attempted anything like the training of her own one darling, but "all the better for probable success of her own plans." Eleanor should owe to her all that was to form her happiness and prosperity in life, and in return she would *of course* devote that life to her benefactress; and Lady Mowbray felt quite impatient for the time and opportunity to arrive when she might begin her operations in behalf of her

friend's daughter. This, however, could not be while her son was abroad and Eleanor still at school, but soon after Sir John's return, being on a visit with him to some friends living about twenty miles from Charlton Rectory, and hearing accidentally from the letter of a mutual friend of her own and Mrs. Castleton that the latter and her daughter were staying there, she persuaded her son to escort her in search of them, and so made acquaintance, as we have seen, with the whole party.

Having so long a return journey before them, Lady Mowbray and Sir John were forced to leave the Rectory sooner than either of them, for different reasons, desired to do so. Before parting, however, Mrs. Castleton had promised an early visit to Dunmore Hall with Eleanor, and Sir John had received and accepted a hearty invitation from Mr. Harrington, to spend a day or two at the Rectory, before he and his mother returned home, for Mr. Harrington was not one of those severe and suspicious fathers who guard

their daughters, however unattractive, from the imaginary dangers of being run away with by every man under fifty, or who make up their minds as to the kind of man, and the profession *they* desire in their sons-in-law, and turn their backs on every other; generally thus securing to their daughters the privilege of remaining single.

CHAPTER VI.

SCARCELY were Lady Mowbray and her son out of sight and hearing, when Almeria disappeared from among the group who had been watching their departure, and was seen no more until the family met at the dinner table, when although the event of the afternoon formed the staple commodity of conversation, the presence of her uncle and mother was an effectual hindrance to the remarks with which Eleanor was impatiently waiting to overwhelm her cousins. Almeria was perfectly aware of this, and had consequently determined to avoid all opportunity for a renewal of the conversation which she had herself introduced, but she was

mistaken in thinking that she could escape from the mischief brewing in Eleanor's active brain, or from the natural criticism evoked by her own unguarded complaints in the latter's sharp and busy intelligence. The evening passed over quietly enough, Mrs. Castleton insisting with unusual persistency on Eleanor's retiring early on the plea of the next day's journey, and the fact of much of the necessary packing being still undone; but hardly had Ada and Almeria entered the room which, with an adjoining dressing-room, they shared together, when, without waiting to knock for admission, Eleanor, in very complete night attire, bounded in, and established herself in a comfortable arm-chair, exclaiming—

"At last we can finish our talk so tiresomely interrupted," with a mischievous look at Almeria, which she was unwise enough to take as it was meant, and which caused her to reply with some warmth—

"I wish you would go to bed, Eleanor, and keep your talk for those who want it. I am tired,

and am going to undress at once, so I would rather you left the room, please."

"I will, if Ada wants me to go," replied Eleanor, looking at her elder cousin, "but I think it is rather hard to be turned out on my last night. Besides, it is not *my* talk, it is your's that I want to go on with. It is so amusing to hear people's opinions, and compare them together; and," added she, with mock humility, "of course it is right that as the youngest I should have every opportunity of profiting by the experience of my elders and betters."

"You did not *look* as if you were listening in a very teachable disposition this afternoon," interposed Ada, smiling; and seeing Almeria's cloudy face, she continued hastily, "But look here, Eleanor, you may stay if you don't make yourself disagreeable by *personal* remarks, and if you are sure Aunt Maria does not mind it."

"Oh, well, as to that, of course she would rather I was in bed, but I told her I shouldn't sleep if I did not relieve my mind first, so she said I might come."

"Very well, only recollect there is to be no squabbling;" and Ada proceeded to prepare for the operation of brushing her hair.

"All right," said Eleanor, "I agree; and now, to reward you for letting me stay, I'll tell you something which I have discovered this evening. It is the most ridiculous joke, but it is too good to keep to myself. What do you think of Lady Mowbray and mamma having arranged that I am to marry Sir John when I am old enough?"

"You!" and, "Eleanor, what do you mean? What nonsense!" were the simultaneous exclamations of Almeria and Ada.

"Of course it's nonsense," replied Eleanor, frisking about the room with more pleasure to herself than her companions, "and that's just the fun of it. Why, do you suppose that *I* would ever marry any one in that way? Bah! it's stupid enough to think of marrying at all, but to marry a man chosen for you, and be stuck down all your life in a place you know all about, why it's quite disgusting to think of; besides, I didn't like the

look of Sir John. I think he's rather a prig, and not at all good-looking."

"But, Eleanor," said Ada, "you talk as if it was a real thing, and it is not at all likely that my aunt and Lady Mowbray would seriously make up so wild a plan."

"Poor mamma, I am sure she is not inclined to be very wild in her ideas," replied Eleanor, rather more soberly, "but anyhow I know from what she let out that she and Lady Mowbray *have* talked over just what I have told you, and she is rather vexed because I laughed so at the notion."

But positive as Eleanor felt of the extent of the conspiracy between her mother and Lady Mowbray, the reader knows that she was mistaken in it, no words beyond vague aspirations regarding the future of their children having passed between the two mothers; nevertheless the reader knows also, that the plan itself was a real one so far as their wishes could make it so.

"And now, perhaps, you will tell us how you

managed to find out what you certainly had no business to know." The speaker was Almeria, who had for a minute or two been struck dumb by Eleanor's announcement, and was only now recovering from the shock.

"Why, you know, when mamma introduced me to Lady Mowbray, she made a speech to her about my dress, which, by the by, she need not have troubled herself to do, for I was particularly tidy to-day, and so Lady Mowbray thought I knew, from what she said; but while mamma was speaking I looked up at her and Lady Mowbray, and they gave each other such a queer look, that I determined I would find out what it meant. Mamma always tells me everything if I bother her; so I did, and then somehow—I am sure I forget how—it gradually came out, and I know it must be true, or mamma would not have been angry when I laughed."

"Well," said Almeria, "you are a specimen certainly of a dutiful daughter, and my aunt of a—" "Wise mother," she was going to say, but

checked herself, for while she was not perhaps unjustified in holding her aunt in supreme contempt, she had learned by experience that she dared not show all she felt, in the presence of her really loyal though somewhat tyrannical young daughter.

"Pshaw!" laughed Eleanor, "what has my bothering mamma got to do with *duty?* It is all nonsense from beginning to end, for every one knows that girls choose their own husbands now-a-days, and if others don't, I will. I think men as a rule are very stupid things; they either talk a lot of nonsense which is not worth listening to, or they are too learned and grand to talk of anything but just the one thing they happen to know something about themselves; and if ever I marry it shall be some one who can make me respect him; I am sure respect is a much better and safer thing for women to feel than love."

"You seem to know a great deal about it," said Almeria scornfully, for without owning to herself the reason, her always haughty and self-

willed temper had been sorely provoked by Eleanor's attitude of indifference towards her own complaints previously, and still more now by the revelations she had made of her mother's combined plan in connection with the mother of so eligible an acquaintance for herself as Sir John Mowbray.

Eleanor could not resist the retort to Almeria's remark, "As much, my dear, as you do at present, and," more gravely, "something more perhaps, for I have a few memories concerning marriage which you have not." Then jumping up she wished her cousins good-night, whispering as she kissed Ada, "Haven't I been good not to tease her about her politeness to Sir John this afternoon?" while as she opened the door, she turned round and said gravely to Almeria, with a dignified but ridiculous gesture, "Fair lady, I leave the field to you; go in and win, and take my blessing with you," and instantly disappeared, accompanied by a loud bang of her cousins' door, followed very quickly by another in the distance,

which proclaimed to all who cared to know it, that Miss Eleanor Castleton had entered her own apartment for the night, and that no one need expect to hear anything more of her for the next eight hours at least.

For a few minutes after her exit neither of the sisters spoke, Almeria being too angry, and Ada too wise to do so while uncertain what she had better say. The world, especially the female half of it, loses much respect and attention from those who ought to give both, from want of this very simple but seldom practised precaution of not speaking until positively forced by circumstances, in doubtful cases, or until doubt becomes certainty in the right thing to be said. A foolish and unsuitable remark made with the best intentions, will often do more harm as fuel to a smouldering fire, than the most prolonged silence where there is a knowledge and scent of danger in the air. If it does no good, at any rate it does no harm, and where people are conscious of possessing no miraculous power of soothing the angry tempers of

their companions, there is this certain advantage in silence, that it invariably excites a feeling of wonder in the mind of the delinquent as to its cause, and a growing desire to know what it is, combined with a certain respect for the unknown power which can give such reticence where they expect to meet with proper appreciation of, and response to their own angry views and speeches.

So in the present instance, Almeria soon began to wonder why her sister made no remark either on Eleanor's communication or her subsequent parting shaft at herself, and as a natural consequence proceeded to cast about in her mind for some way of commencing the subject, which should enable her to discuss it with Ada without sacrificing her own dignity; for she was perfectly conscious that in her sudden urbanity of manner towards Sir John Mowbray, she had given full cause for any mischievous remarks Eleanor might have made, inasmuch as in their previous conversation, she, Almeria, had proclaimed the cause of her unhappiness as she called it—discontent

as it appeared to others—to be her banishment from all kindred souls. She professed and really believed herself to be oppressed with aspirations and noble aims which were perfectly incapable of being *attempted* even, in a stupid country parish, and as regarded herself she felt and did not scruple to say to her patient sister, that it was simply absurd to suppose that a wretched curate, who spent all his time in poking in and out of schools and cottages, and in writing rubbish which no one cared to hear when he preached it, could be in any way a suitable life companion for her, who was bent on making a mark in the world, not of course for her own selfish pleasure—that would be mean and degrading, and Almeria scorned meanness, at least she said so, and of course she knew—but because she longed to join the great army of reformers, and was fully persuaded from her extensive reading and experience that beauty and strength of intellect combined must carry all before them. Now this was the only point on which Almeria had a glimmering

of truth as concerned herself. She had beauty and intellect in unusual proportions, but she made the common mistake of believing that they could and would do wonders in her proper person. So far as we know, such a combination may do marvels of mischief, and work plenty of destruction, and woe to those who fix their hopes or love on them, but it is not the mixture out of which woman's strength and consequently woman's work for good proceed. Intellect is an excellent thing in either man or woman, and capable of far greater use than the selfish purposes by which it is ordinarily bounded, and which, while warping its action, narrow at the same time its own receiving powers; but in the case of women it is far more often a dangerous than a beneficial power, because it is exalted out of its natural position as a secondary influence, and put in the place of its natural, superior wisdom. This is not the place for a dissertation on the respective merits and places of precedence of intellect and wisdom; my story and its cha-

racters will, I trust, spare me the trouble of impressing by verbal insistance a truth which every-day life brings home with every-day experience to all who trouble themselves at all more about their present lives than to be satisfied that they exist to do all they can to make themselves comfortable while they live here, and to keep here as long as nature and art combined can manage to stave off from them the inevitable lot of man.

Almeria, then, who with all her intellect was not a match for her wiser though less clever sister, after waiting and wishing without result to be addressed, was at last fain to open the subject herself on which her thoughts were running.

"Don't you agree with me in thinking Eleanor very much less pleasant than she was, Ada?"

"I think she has been so to you to-day," answered Ada, "but otherwise I see no difference in her; and if you won't mind my saying it, I don't think you go the best way to work to make her agreeable."

"Why should I trouble myself to make her anything?" asked Almeria. "It is nothing to me if that silly woman, Aunt Maria, chooses to let her grow up in such a careless fashion and with such ridiculous ideas."

"Certainly not, if you don't mind the result to yourself, but if you do, I think, as I said, that it would be wiser to treat her differently. For instance, why did you enter into such details this afternoon concerning your own feelings and character, and let her know how discontented you are with your life? You must not expect that you can take her into your confidence one half hour, and exact respect for your opinions, unless they deserve it, from a girl nearly as old as yourself."

Ada spoke unusually severely and with a vehemence which astonished Almeria, who seldom met with active opposition or positive remonstrance in her home, but she felt aggrieved at the latter's display of sentimental folly, and ungrateful depreciation of her lot, and in many respects of her own and her father's love

and frequent efforts to provide for her the amusement necessary to satisfy her. Yet Almeria would indignantly deny that she cared for it except as a means to an end. She wanted to mix in society that she might learn more of human nature; or she longed for friends who could sympathise in, and discuss with her, her intentions and hopes in the future, or she felt the need of higher intellectual intercourse with men who lived in the *world*, and who must necessarily have a grasp of mind and largeness of imagination quite incompatible with the narrow life, as it seemed to her, which her father, in choosing for himself, had condemned his children to share; but she never dreamed that her real wants were those caused by unsatisfied vanity and an empty heart; for while her head was full of foolish thoughts and plans, her heart loved nothing but her own comfort and the vain imaginations of her head, and few will be inclined, I think, to contend, that her feelings for her father and sister deserved a place in the emotions attributed to the

heart, for they were not strong enough to reconcile her to life spent in their society and for their happiness. In this Almeria was not altogether to blame, only so far as she wilfully blinded herself to the truth, by which means she encouraged herself in her false estimate of her own character, and became daily more unjust and narrow-minded towards others.

We must return, however, to the discussion between the two girls. Almeria was so much taken aback by her sister's severe view of her sentimental revelations, and their natural effect on Eleanor, that she neglected to assert her superior intellect as usual, and quietly continued her operations, meditating as she did so on the possibility of her—for once—having made a mistake in the plan she had adopted with the intention of impressing Eleanor, once and for all, with a due sense of her superior nature and requirements. She was uneasy, too, at the bare idea of having shown too plainly her pleasure in the visit of Sir John—for of his mother she

never thought—and not quite comfortable regarding the plan detected by Eleanor, however foolish and unlikely it appeared now. After a somewhat long pause, during which Ada's sense again kept her silent, Almeria said in a voice, the meekness of which was a remarkable variation from that which she usually adopted—

"I am going to ask you something. Did I, or did I not, behave otherwise than was in all respects becoming to-day? You know what I mean?"

"Yes," replied Ada, without hesitation, "I do know, and assure you that nothing but your ordinary manner being so immediately opposite to that of to-day could have called for a remark; but after seeing your disgusted look and manner to poor Mr. Lewis, I really can't wonder that Eleanor noticed the difference."

"Oh, as to that I care nothing," retorted Almeria. "I should be sorry to do anything contrary to what you think correct, but I am not going to alter my manner to people I don't like—

and as to Miss Eleanor, if she had not been delighted at that ridiculous plan, we should never have heard of anything else. However, many a true word is spoken in jest, and so we may both find it. Good-night, Ada; I shan't talk any more," and in a few minutes silence, if not sleep, reigned in Mr. Harrington's household.

CHAPTER VII.

EARLY the next morning Mrs. Castleton and Eleanor took their departure from the Rectory, where, as usual, they had been spending the holidays, for Mr. Harrington was as kind to his sister as to every one else who was no trouble to him, and this she had wisely abstained from being, knowing his love of ease too well to risk losing the welcome he had ever given her, by making him fear the entrance of her grievances with herself into his house. As may be supposed, Almeria saw them depart with unusual satisfaction, but outwardly peace and cousinly affection were restored between her and Eleanor, who made no further allusion to anything unpleasant, and was fully occupied in

saying good-bye to all the live stock of the establishment—including the pig—and in her regret at quitting her uncle and Ada, to both of whom she was much attached. But at last all farewells were said, the Rectory party reduced to their normal number, and the sisters to their every-day life.

From this day, however, Ada perceived a change in her sister, and one which puzzled, although it relieved her. Almeria indulged in no more wearying complaints or impossible desires—impossible, that is, in their present fulfilment—she occupied herself quietly and rationally, and even joined Ada, with some appearance of interest, in amusing her father in the evening with the games he was accustomed to spend with them in playing. And all the while she had a curious and unusual expression about her, both of face and manner. She was unusually silent, but she was also considerably less overbearing than her father and sister were accustomed to see her, and they rejoiced accordingly,

the former flattering himself that his younger daughter was going at last to show herself in the light of a contented common-sense girl, and the latter, gradually perceiving that Almeria had an object and purpose in her present self-control, and shrewdly suspecting its nature, also permitted herself to hope that, whether for her happiness or not in the present, it might, at any rate, prove the commencement of a lasting change for the better in Almeria's character. This hope was founded in Ada's mind, of course, on her own experience. She knew what trouble and disappointment had done for her; how they had forced her to take up the cross appointed for her, and how in bearing it she had found peace and content, and a certain independence and freedom from small worries, which passed by her without touching her, and she judged from this, that if Almeria was really, as she imagined, building any hopes on the new acquaintances they had made, even if they ended in disappointment, it would be better for her, and more likely

to bring her to a happier state of mind than the objectless, desultory life of her present existence, in which she wanted nothing in particular that she could define, but everything in general which she could imagine. So a week passed on with unaccustomed freedom from domestic worries, for exerting which Almeria had an unusual talent, although she would indignantly have denied the accusation, and might have declared with truth that she hated the trouble both of servants and parish too much ever to care to interfere with their management, which was strictly true; nevertheless, she was not averse to making all possible use of the former, so she interested herself in all the village gossip concerning the latter, and the result, joined to her discontented and haughty manner, in the one cause, and love of showing her talent for telling a good story in the other, had occasioned more small difficulties and dissensions during her year's stay at home, than in those preceding, which were spent by her at school.

At the end of a week Almeria's patience began to give way—at least, she was conscious of a greater difficulty in restraining herself—but, fortunately for all concerned, before she had betrayed this outwardly, a note arrived from Sir John Mowbray for the Rector, reminding him of his accepted invitation, and saying that, as his mother would be returning home shortly, and he was bound to be her escort, he would at once avail himself of the pleasure promised him in spending a few days at the Rectory. He added that if he heard nothing to the contrary he should arrive on Friday afternoon, two days after Mr. Harrington would receive his letter, thus giving him time to stop his visit if he wished to do so. Ada could not resist a furtive look at her sister, as her father read aloud Sir John's note, beginning already, as we have said, to suspect what was in her thoughts; and the sudden flush of pleasure and triumph which overspread her face and brightened her eyes, left her no longer any doubt on the matter. It cer-

tainly seemed strange to her that one half-hour's acquaintance could create an interest which appeared as great to Ada's inexperienced eyes as that which she had herself known after a month of intimate companionship, but then, she reflected, there was such a thing as love at first sight, and why should not her sister become its victim as well as any one else? So reasoning, Ada set herself to work to crush the rising remembrance of her own forbidden love, and to realise, by the help of that indwelling spirit of peace and wisdom, sent by the Great Teacher to the hearts of all who honestly strive for the mastery over self, that for her own portion in the present, devotion to those who required her services, and not to one who might have made her own happiness, was the cross which demanded her powers of endurance, and in which she must still find such satisfaction as is ever given to the willing follower of a suffering Master.

As to Almeria, she appeared to have taken a new lease of her life, or rather of her spirits.

She was not afraid of her father making any awkward remarks upon this fact, for, independently of his natural deficiencies as an observer of human nature in the persons of his daughters, he knew this one too well to risk the unpleasant effects of any injudicious remark on her personal behaviour, however well or kindly intended, while Ada knew so much already, that Almeria did not care how much more she guessed, and knowing nothing to the contrary of her sister's past, believed her to be entirely ignorant of everything connected with the subjects of love and marriage, and, therefore, not likely to run counter to her in anything she might find it expedient to desire, by which her suddenly conceived plan might be made a blissful reality. Mr. Harrington, of course, did not hinder Sir John's visit, and on the day specified he duly arrived; but leaving him for the present to make the most of his opportunities there, we must lay before the reader the difficulties which he had had to encounter to reach this desired haven.

It was not likely, perhaps, that in any case an elderly lady and a young man of twenty-four would see the family at the Rectory with the same eyes, and in this particular instance *we* know, although Sir John did not, that his mother had formed in her own mind a special interest regarding one member of it, while all were strangers alike, which greatly hindered her power of appreciating rightly their respective attractions. Now, if the truth must be owned, Lady Mowbray, while struck with the promise of future beauty in Eleanor Castleton, was somewhat shocked privately at the extreme plainness, not to say carelessness, of her attire, for she was herself propriety personified, in dress as well as manner, and considered it one of her dues, that others around her should be equally punctilious. At first, then, she was unpleasantly surprised at her friend's excuses for Eleanor's appearance being so manifestly reasonable; but an instant's reflection reminded her that here was the daughter-in-law who was to be trained by her own

skilful hand. Surely, then, it was an advantage on both sides that the ground on which she had to work should be as fallow as possible; it would afford her all the more interest in sowing and cultivating, and make her labour all the easier; so she quickly decided that she preferred, in this instance, young girls being indifferent to dress and appearance, and beguiled Eleanor also into the belief that she approved of her style of dress, without any intentional deception on the good lady's part.

During the greater part of their journey back to the house at which they were staying, the mother and son exchanged few remarks, each being occupied with their own thoughts, and neither liking to betray them to the other. Lady Mowbray's reflections were pleasingly occupied, in plans for the ensuing Christmas visit from Eleanor and her mother, when, as she calculated, she might introduce the thin edge of that wedge which was intended to secure her such a permanent hold over her son's wife as should ensure

the happiness of his whole household, present and future: for Lady Mowbray was quite convinced that every one who dwelt under her shadow might be happy, if they chose. She, indeed, suffered through their misdeeds, but very few held within themselves such capabilities as she did in this direction, and she was fully persuaded that if people would only take her advice and abide by it, it would be their own fault if they did not find it answer. In proof of this, she would cite the happy and peaceful life of her beloved husband, who never knew a care during their sixteen years' union, but was content and blessed in his unwearied devotion to herself, proved not only by his active attendance upon her every movement, but by his voluminous daily letters when accident or necessity parted them at any time, all of which were filled with regrets for her absence, and expressions of undying attachment to herself. Poor man! it was perfectly true that he did submit to keep his liege lady in good humour by such deceitful means,

but who shall blame him? especially as we know he ought to have felt all this, although we are afraid he exaggerated facts in making such statements.

However, the pleasing recollections of former success as a ruler, encouraged Lady Mowbray to dwell on her coming happiness in the renewal of her glory, and her imagination had carried her so far as the marriage of her son with the wife of *her* choice, when she was roused to a sense of his probable rejection of the position of bridegroom on the occasion, by the following conversation—

"Mother," said Sir John, as they entered the carriage sent to meet them at the station from which they had started in the morning, "who is Mrs. Castleton, and how did you first know her? I forgot to ask you anything about the people we were going to see, beforehand."

"Mrs. Castleton is an old school friend of mine," replied his mother, "to whom I am much attached; but you have surely often heard

me speak of her, and of her visits to me during your absence abroad. Poor woman! her married life was a sad contrast to my own—such devotion in the one case, and such ungentlemanly want of due consideration in the other—but she was very much to blame for giving way to anything of the kind. Poor Maria is not wise, and she was foolish enough not to *insist* on the attention due to a wife at once; the consequence was, that Mr. Castleton, from being a rather difficult man to live with—he was so dreadfully *exigéant*—became a perfect bear. Such a contrast to your dear father, whose devotion, as you know, my dear boy, increased with every year of our lives."

Now, Sir John knew nothing of the sort. He certainly remembered many occasions on which his mother had assured him, as she did now, of this happy fact in her own and his father's married existence, and he never ventured to contradict her, but if he had said what he knew from his own observation, it would have given a somewhat different impression. He had dearly

loved his father, and respected him, while he pitied him, for he could see well enough that he was unhappy and dispirited, and he had a vague consciousness that he did not look on marriage by any means as the acme of human happiness. Moreover, although his father always mentioned his mother, and her not unfrequent ailments of a mysterious nature, with all outward signs of sympathy and respect, and treated her in his presence with scrupulous attention, the boy had observed a strange elation in his father whenever he was released by any cause from his mother's companionship, and often pondered on the peculiarity of a devotion which was so much happier *out* of its object's presence, than in it. He never, however, arrived at a satisfactory conclusion, and, therefore, wisely put the subject altogether on one side, when death gave to the unfortunate husband of Lady Mowbray a respite from his labours on her behalf.

As her son made no reply to her remark on Mr. and Mrs. Castleton's domestic infelicity, she

continued to talk on, until she found that he was paying no attention to her, when he suddenly startled her by asking—

"Couldn't you ask that old gentleman and his daughters to spend a week or two with us? I expect I shall find it rather dull at home."

"My dear John, you may be quite sure I shall not forget to provide everything for your happiness," she replied with majestic but smiling dignity. "I have already asked Mrs. Castleton and her daughter to spend the Christmas weeks with us: as to Mr. Harrington, I do not know him sufficiently, or his daughters either."

"You soon will though, or at least I shall," retorted Sir John. "For you know I am going to stay there next week."

"Indeed, I knew nothing of the kind," said Lady Mowbray. "And if you will be advised by me, you will not go."

Sir John smiled to himself, but only replied—

"Why not, mother?"

"My dear boy," she began—it was her usual

form of address to him—"you should remember your position as an unmarried man of some importance, and how essential it is that you should not excite false hopes in the minds of all the foolish young women you may meet with. I foresee that you will do this if you go to Charlton Rectory, for it is not likely that those girls can often, if ever, meet men of your position and attractions, and as, of course, you cannot marry either, you had much better keep entirely away from them."

"Then why did you make me escort you to-day?" enquired her son in a less dutiful accent than usual.

This was an unfortunate question for Lady Mowbray's plans, but she was equal to the occasion.

"I wished you to see my friend's daughter before thrusting them on you as visitors, but you were so taken up with that forward Miss Harrington, that I own my visit was a disappointment to me."

And here Lady Mowbray sighed deeply.

"What *could* you want me to see that dark, shabby little girl for, I wonder," said Sir John laughing, "as if I care whether she comes to Dunmore Hall or not. If *you* like her and her mother to stay two months, she is quite welcome, as far as I am concerned."

"And in return, I suppose you expect me to ask any flirting young lady that *you* like to disgrace the house, and inveigle you into a foolish marriage. No, John, I know my duty to you as your mother, and I shall do it."

Her son was silent for a moment, then apparently waking up to some idea of his mother's meaning, he exclaimed good-humouredly—

"I do believe you have got an idea of consoling your friend for her bearish husband, by giving me to her daughter! Now look here, mother—I am not going to marry at all at present, but when I do, I warn you, I shall choose my own wife."

By this time Lady Mowbray had retired

behind her pocket-handkerchief, driven there, as she afterwards affirmed, by her son's neglect of due consideration, and she refused to emerge from her retreat until they reached the house, when she retired, professing herself too fatigued to appear again that evening.

After that, the mother and son, I am sorry to say, did not arrange their plans as amicably as they should have done, and, what is more, they mutually astonished each other. The present Sir John showed himself to be so very unlike the father who had preceded him, that if Mrs. Castleton could have been behind the scenes she would have relinquished all desire of claiming him as a son-in-law, and Lady Mowbray so completely opened her son's eyes to the consequences of opposing her wishes in matters on which they differed, that he no longer wondered at the depression of his predecessor in the family honours, or felt any difficulty in understanding its cause. Unfortunately this new view of the case only confirmed him in his determination to

take a different course himself, and although he had no thought of Almeria, except as a pretty girl whom he should like to see again, his mother's evident fear of the consequences of a visit to the Rectory, determined him to go, if it was for nothing else than to show her that he could take care of himself in spite of all the "foolish young women" in the world. Moreover, he by no means agreed with his mother in her remark that of course he could not marry one of the Rector's daughters. He certainly did not intend to do so, but he could see no reason why he should not, if he did intend it; neither could he at all understand why Eleanor should be a more suitable wife for him in his mother's estimation than her older and prettier cousins; for Lady Mowbray had shrunk from acknowledging that she had actually been intending to provide a *daughter-in-law* for *herself* rather than a *wife* for her *son*; and, strange to say, this wilful lady by no means relinquished her intention, although she privately resented the trouble

her son seemed inclined to give her in the arrangement of his future prospects.

The day, however, arrived on which he had settled to go to Charlton Rectory, and thither he set off, wishing his mother a kind good-bye, and bidding her not fidget about him; but with all his kindness of *manner* she perceived, plainly enough, that he had inherited a good deal less of his father's yielding disposition than she had hoped for, while he mentally determined that no woman, be she mother or wife, should rule *him*, but that he would go through life, master—as of course he ought to be—of himself and all belonging to him. Which latter extension, however, of his domain disposes me to fear that he resembled his mother more than his father.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIR JOHN'S stay at Charlton Rectory was an unexpectedly pleasant one to him, following, as it did, so closely on the uncomfortable experience he had lately gone through of a real disagreement with his mother, for, in addition to the relief of escape from a gloomy moral atmosphere—which we all know the discomfort of in a greater or less degree—he found in his host a kind and genial companion, and in his eldest daughter a specimen of woman nature which raised, for the first time in his life, a regret that he had no sister of his own; while his admiration of Almeria's beauty increased, rather than otherwise, with observation, and he was too much dazzled by it to be capable of think-

ing of anything else fairly in connection with her. She, as my readers will guess, was not backward in exerting herself to the utmost to deepen the impression which, as she could not fail to see, she had made on the young Baronet, and in this, her first experience of an admirer, she forgot, not only her previous mortifications in seeing her sister preferred to herself, but proceeded a step further than the truth, and assured herself that this also had been her own doing, and that her contempt, not want of admiration, had hitherto kept her free from any such excitement as she now experienced, for the first time, in the company of one with whom she was paramount in importance among her own family. Yet, being still only nineteen, it was somewhat strange that she should have given herself over, as we are aware was the case, to the state of complaining restlessness in which we found her.

For the time, however, that was gone as if it had never existed, and Almeria was contented to bask in the present happiness she had so sud-

denly discovered, by which life had already become a different thing to her, and being pleased herself, it was wonderful how charming she became. The one drawback to her beauty had always been her expression, which was that of habitual discontent and disgust, dispersed at times into a gloominess which went near to destroying her claim to any real beauty, but under Sir John's enlivening influence, her normal look and manner brightened into one of such unusual amiability and lively interest in everything around, that while she excited the wonder of her own household, it is not to be wondered at if she unintentionally deceived the cause of such a change, and made him believe that her outward looks were a fit accompaniment to that inward brightness and sweetness of disposition which was all he had yet seen of one so recently a stranger, and yet so quickly taking her place in his every thought. Sir John was perfectly honest when he said to himself that he had no intention of marrying any one, but then he did not

know that any one intended to marry *him*, and, consequently, was not as much on his guard as he would have been had he suspected what his mother guessed, viz., that in that quiet country rectory there lived a spirit of worldly ambition enshrined in the fair form of Almeria Harrington, which had already espied in her son a likely object through whom to gain her desired ends, and blind as Lady Mowbray was—like the rest of us—to her *own* weak points, she could see those of other people quickly enough. Apparently she had been so absorbed in her friend and Eleanor that she had paid no attention to the younger Miss Harrington, to whom also her attention had not been directed by Mrs. Castleton in the first instance, from a cause which the reader will remember, but it was this very neglect of ordinary civility to herself as a visitor and stranger, coupled with Almeria's subsequent change of manner to her son, and evident willingness to encourage his admiration, which first attracted Lady Mowbray's attention, and then

assured her that there was danger to her own plans in the society of this lovely, but to a mother's eye *un*attractive, young girl. Mothers-in-law in possession are not an interesting or lovable race, as a rule, to any daughters-in-law, however honest in intention and open in their system of withdrawing from the mother the love which will bear no rival, either in wife or mother; but mothers-in-law in *prospect* are generally thought of sufficient consequence by aspirants to the situation of a son's wife—especially an only one—to be worth conciliating by a little outward attention, and the display of the most engaging qualities at the command of such an aspirant. And, doubtless, Almeria, with all her boasted intellect, would have recognised this wisdom, not hidden from very inferior capacities, of thus enlisting in her favour the approval of Lady Mowbray, had she been warned beforehand of the opportunities approaching her in the person of that lady; but, as so often happens, Almeria did simply what

suited *herself*, until she saw reason to conclude that it would be to her advantage to change her views regarding her own wishes, and when this happened, as we know it quickly did, she was not too late to impress herself on Sir John's recollection, as favourably as she could have wished, but the moment wherein she might have ingratiated herself with his mother was irretrievably gone, and no power of persuasion would ever erase from her mind the impression of Almeria's unfitness to fill the position to which she detected her ambition to rise.

I do not mean that even Lady Mowbray was foolish enough to believe that Almeria had conceived the thought of marrying Sir John the first moment she saw him; but it was patent that he was worth making acquaintance with, in her estimation, by the readiness with which she suffered him to do so, while she had ignored her aunt's introduction of him and his mother as *her* friends; and a more stupid woman than the latter would have seen Almeria's character

in the assumed haughtiness and air of superiority which proclaimed equally what she desired to be, and her unsuitableness for the position she coveted, viz., that of a fashionable lady, which none are really fit to be who cannot control their own follies; otherwise folly as fashion will govern them. Sir John, however, was as blind to everything but what Almeria wished him to see in her, as even she could have desired. Without the least intention of falling in love, he was enveloped already in that illusive state, and suffered himself to risk his mother's renewed anger by remaining away twice as long as he had at first intended. As, however, all times and seasons alike draw to an end and take their place in the past, so, notwithstanding this delay, Almeria saw the morning dawn on which their guest was to leave them, without any assurance of a chance that her fate might be altered by his visit, beyond the conviction that she was an object of admiration and interest such as she had never been before; and she was

proportionately inclined to despair, and to return with tenfold bitterness to her hatred of all the accompaniments of her quiet life, at the bare thought that all her late hopes and consequent self-restraint had been for nothing, and that even if hereafter she and Sir John should meet, the interval must be spent by her in the uncertainty and weariness of "hope deferred."

So with an already somewhat heavy heart, she preceded her sister downstairs a few hours before Sir John had arranged to leave the Rectory, and, not without a lurking hope that he also might have risen earlier than usual, passed out of the garden door, as we have already heard was Ada's custom, though for a different reason, two years before the present time. Sir John, however, did not appear until all were seated at breakfast. He would have liked very well to have met Almeria had he known of her being out, but he was never fond of early rising, and abhorred family prayer, having suffered much from his mother's method of conducting it, and

the Rector, who liked every one to please themselves, within a certain limit, had made no allusion either to the fact of family worship or to the advisability of his guest's presence at it. But although the latter gave no sign of his love altogether satisfactory to the anxious mind of Almeria, he did not deceive *himself* as to the fact of his being so far under the spell of her beauty and apparent liking for him, that he could no longer with truth declare to his mother that he could take care of himself, if that meant that he would not suffer himself to fall in love. He knew he was in love, but he knew also that he did not mean to tell Almeria so until he had spoken to his mother, and prepared her for a daughter-in-law against whom she had already rebelled in imagination, but whom he was equally determined to force on her when she had had a reasonable time to get over her first objections. He, therefore, contented himself with a lengthened pressure of Almeria's hand at the last moment, and a farewell look of consider-

able meaning, coupled with an expressive "Au revoir" in place of the "good-bye" of ordinary leave-takers, and departed without any mention even of his hope to see his present host and his daughters at his own home the following autumn. For he durst not take so decisive a step as this, until he had seen his mother and soothed her, if possible, into compliance with his wishes. Almeria's present disappointment was excessive; neither could she comprehend what possible obstacle could have hindered her lover, as she saw him to be, from securing her more than ready consent to share with him his title, and all its attendant pleasures and rights. So great was her anger, and so wilful her refusal of all the probabilities that suggested themselves to her sister, of the cause for Sir John's silence on the subject of their acquaintance being renewed in the future, that the Rector observed and ventured to comment on the change in her appearance; for the violent agitation of suddenly dashed hopes was making its ill-effects clearly

visible in Almeria's looks, and her father, partly guessing the cause, determined to send her for a time from the scene of her disappointment, hoping that she would find distraction in change of place, from the recent unfortunate excitement, as it appeared to him, connected with Sir John Mowbray's visit.

It will be seen, from what I have described as Almeria's state of mind, that there was no real love in her heart towards the man whom she was nevertheless prepared to marry the moment he asked her. She had said truly that she did not care to marry if she could procure what she wanted of change and amusement in her life by any other means, but she had made up her mind that this was very unlikely in her case, and therefore marriage alone appeared to her a possible refuge from the insupportable weariness of her present existence. For this reason, when the probability was put before her in the guise of a man of higher position than her own, of independent means, sufficiently good looks, and

who showed, moreover, a decided admiration for herself, she gave her mind up without hesitation to the hope, that in him she should find her longed-for deliverance, and her excessive pride caused her to reject with impatient anger, the uncertainty which necessity and prudence entailed on him, who *should* have been the most impatient in the matter. He was not so, because he never doubted Almeria's continuance in that preference for him which she had abundantly testified, and which of course he regarded as proceeding from reciprocal attachment to himself. The only stumblingblock *he* anticipated lay in his mother's opposition to the selection he had made of a wife, and to himself it seemed that in that last expressive, though not *explicit* leave-taking, he had given the latter as sure an avowal of his feelings as he could venture upon, until he had ascertained how far he might put them into words, without danger of a serious quarrel with his mother.

But all his thoughts were hidden from the un-

trained, impatient mind of his newly found attraction, while we know how far her's were from those which a lover, however blinded by love to his chosen one's failings, could have approved or felt flattered by; and while it was unlucky for Almeria that she did not or would not understand him, it was fortunate for the sake of her credit as a woman, that he had no idea of the strong disappointment he had excited in her self-willed heart. As it was, he returned to find his mother mild outwardly, but determinedly opposed to his wishes; so after a scene which ended, as usual, in one of her mysterious attacks, and kept her in bed three days, a compromise was effected between them, Sir John promising that he would not formally propose to Almeria until he had had an opportunity of again seeing, at least, his most eligible neighbours among the country families, from among whom his mother, shifting her tactics, urged that he might find a far more suitable and equally attractive wife, while she promised not to oppose his choice if at the

end of three months it still remained fixed on Almeria. Thus it fell out that nothing being heard of their late visitor, except a brief note to Mr. Harrington thanking him for his hospitality, and expressing a general hope of the renewal of their intimacy on some future occasion, Almeria suffered herself to be sent on a visit to an old friend of her father's, the vicar of a small country town, whose kind old maiden sister gladly accepted the offered visit of Mr. Harrington's supposed invalid daughter, this being the exaggerated impression she had contrived to receive, of the remark in the Rector's letter to her brother, to the effect that change of air and scene were advised for his daughter, who had not been looking well or in good spirits lately. Here, then, we find Almeria banished, and Sir John at home, blissfully, in the latter case, unconscious of, and unhappily, in the former, mistaken in the real feelings and plans one of the other. Had there been any marvels of second sight available for either, perhaps Almeria might

have had more patience; but her lover, I think, would have listened more willingly to his mother's representations upon the virtues most necessary to secure comfort with a wife, although he had begun to recognise in her a very poor example of her own precepts; in this, however, Lady Mowbray was not worse than most of her neighbours.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE years have passed since the events recorded in my last chapter. Almeria is no longer Miss Harrington, but the proud and haughty wife of a devoted husband; not, however, Sir John Mowbray, who is still unmarried, and who has not yet recovered that regard for Almeria's sisterhood which her, to him, incomprehensible behaviour had so rudely shaken out of existence. But our story has too long followed the fortune of those who are, after all, secondary heroines in this truthful record of real life; therefore, leaving Almeria and Sir John Mowbray to re-appear when they are needed, we will go in search of Eleanor Castleton, and satisfy ourselves concerning the changes wrought

in her by the advance from sixteen to nineteen years of age.

We find her seated by her mother's invalid couch, watching, with anxious solicitude, the failing strength of her only near relation—with the exception of her uncle and cousins—and devoting her young life and talents to the care and amusement of one who was as unthinkingly selfish towards her young daughter as she had been foolishly aggravating to her irritable husband. Mrs. Castleton could never understand anything but what was so plain as to be incapable of misapprehension, and what she always had been, that she now always would be while life remained; therefore, because Eleanor did not complain of fatigue, her mother did not suspect its existence, and because she was always cheerful, Mrs. Castleton never imagined that she had a hard fight against depression, and that weariness which a healthy nature always experiences under the weight of a companionship which has nothing in it of an elevating or soothing

character. The two are placed near a window at which enter the scents of a June afternoon, with its accompanying murmurs, and the late song of a nightingale, who seems to feel that he has not much time left to enchant the world, and so must make the greatest possible efforts while his power is still his own for that purpose.

Everything is still besides, for the little lawn on which Eleanor looks is snugly shut in and removed from the road leading to the town, near which she and her mother live, and it is too hot and dusty for any of her few friends to be likely to call and disturb her; so gradually Eleanor drops the book with which she has read her mother to sleep, and falls into a doze by her side. As she thus sleeps, in all unconsciousness of observation, we will see for ourselves how far she has changed outwardly during the last three years. Very little apparently; nor has she yet fulfilled the promise of her youth in attaining those proportions of womanly beauty of form which seemed so clearly contained in her girlish

figure at sixteen. But her life since then has been one of fatigue and self-sacrifice, her mother's illness having developed itself a few months after that stay at Charlton Rectory which first introduced her to the reader, and such an existence, however willingly borne and cheerfully given up to another, is not conducive to full development of the physical nature. It cannot, therefore, be said of Eleanor that she had improved, as heroines always are said to improve at her age. Her complexion, too, was less bright, and her dress not very much prettier than when we last saw her, and if she has changed as little in character as in outward looks, we shall have no difficulty in recognising our old acquaintance when she wakes.

She had not slept long, when a ring at the front door announced that all her friends were not deterred by the hot and dusty road from disturbing the peace of the afternoon's repose in which she was indulging, and a minute after, the door of her mother's invalid sitting-room was

quietly opened, and an elderly servant came up to Eleanor, roused her gently, and asked if she would see Mr. MacMahon, the clergyman of the parish. At first Eleanor replied, saying that she did not want to be "bothered with visitors," a feeling with which, I fear, many of us are ungrateful enough to regard the attempts made by our neighbours to while away the time which hangs heavily on their own hands, under the plea of paying us proper attention. Almost immediately, however, she remembered that her present visitor was an unaccustomed one, and curiosity to know his errand overpowered her unwillingness to be disturbed, so bidding the old servant take her place by her still sleeping mother, she entered the drawing-room where Mr. MacMahon was awaiting her. He was a big and rather heavy-looking man, but one whom to know was to love, so full was he of that tender pity towards the sinner which is the only Divine example given us of the way in which God would have us, who are all, in our several degrees,

"miserable sinners," sought out and brought home to him. Mr. MacMahon was not one of those men who regard themselves as watch-dogs, rather than shepherds, over their flocks; neither was he such a kind of shepherd as are those who think that it is their duty, as well as privilege, to meddle in all the private affairs of their people, and to visit them ministerially, whether they desire it or not. He was emphatically a friend in need, but he never felt aggrieved when it happened that among his parishioners, poor as well as rich, there were those who thought they understood the way in which God would have them go, as clearly as their appointed pastor, and who did not care in sickness for other comfort than that which they received from Him, who listens and speaks to the feeblest prayer and suppliant, as surely as to the most learned and accustomed leader of the petitions which so many confide in rather when made for them, than uttered by themselves. In Mrs. Castleton's case Mr. MacMahon had long known of her suffer-

ing and failing state, but having detected in her, very early in their acquaintance, an extreme reserve on all such subjects as might lead to any religious conversation between them, he had wisely forborne to press on her any more frequent or closer intimacy than she was inclined for, knowing that the ways of Divine wisdom are as infinite in number as deep in mysterious working upon our hidden nature, and that his people would not fear to send for him as soon as the need arose for any human help which he could give them.

When Eleanor entered the drawing-room in which this good clergyman awaited her, he rose from his seat, and, taking both her hands, looked kindly at her tired and still sleepy eyes, saying as he did so—

"My dear, you must forgive me for disturbing you, but I was anxious to enquire myself after your mother; it is long since I have known anything of her state, except from hearsay."

"Mamma is much the same, I am afraid,"

replied Eleanor; "at least she says so, and I can see she is no better, but sometimes I think, though she does not, that she is really worse."

"That is what I fear," said Mr. MacMahon; "indeed, it was to tell you this, if you did not already know it, that I came to-day." Then, seeing a look of terror pass over the face of his companion, he added quickly, "You know already all I have to tell you, so do not be needlessly alarmed. The truth is that I met Dr. Stonor this morning, who told me of your mother's increased illness, and of his fear that she was unconscious of his own serious view of it, although he had made no secret of this; and you must forgive me if I judged wrongly in coming to you to speak of it; but such things are best known, and more easily borne when they do not find us quite unprepared."

"Oh, Mr. MacMahon," cried poor Eleanor, "you are quite right, and very kind to tell me, but no preparation can make it easier to bear;" and she turned away to hide her overflowing eyes,

for few girls had her horror of giving way in any sense, especially in the presence of witnesses.

"Yes, Eleanor, it does give one a greater power of endurance, but I agree with you in what you really mean, and that is, that no amount of preparation can lessen our *sorrow*. This is true, and for sorrow there is no healer but submission to a wiser Will and deeper Love than our own."

"Ah," she replied, "I can believe that it is love to my mother which takes her to a happier life than this has been to her, but how can it be love to me? Why, Mr. MacMahon, you don't know how solitary I shall be if she is taken, and it cannot be good for any one so young as I am to be left so."

"Not happy, certainly, my poor child," answered her good and sympathising friend, "but who among us can tell beforehand what is and what is not for our good? One only knows, Eleanor, and you must trust Him to take care of the orphans He makes."

For a few minutes our heroine remained silent, resolutely gulping down the tears which threatened to overturn her enforced composure under this first glimpse of the possible chance that, for her also, the world had clouds as well as sunshine. For, hitherto, Eleanor had not realised this. She had been as happy in her attendance on her invalid mother as she had previously been in that which she had given at school for the purposes of education. Her mind was thoroughly healthy, and with the sense of physical strength, and of her mother's devotion, she had never felt the need of anything beyond the amusements within her reach. Even when these, simple as they were, were curtailed by Mrs. Castleton's illness, Eleanor accepted the fact, as a matter of necessity, but not as one to be made a source of trouble, and she was unconscious, as yet, of the harm arising to herself, physically, from too close confinement with an invalid. Now this statement may seem at variance with the previous remarks on the trial

which Eleanor's restrained life had been to her, but is not so really. There is no living human creature who has attained to the age at which we now speak of her, without being made conscious that the world does not satisfy all their capabilities of enjoyment at all times; that some things in their own lives are hard and distasteful, and that they do not feel equally bright under all circumstances; and these experiences Eleanor had been aware of, with the rest of us. But there are two ways of receiving troubles of every-day occurrence, and Eleanor's way was to under-rate and make the best of them; consequently it was true that the first certain conviction of her mother's danger was her first glimpse of a cloud capable of shutting out the sunshine, even from her hopeful and courageous young spirit.

After giving her time to check the feelings which, however natural, Mr. MacMahon saw she would not yield to before him, he rose to go, but Eleanor, as if struck by a sudden idea, de-

tained him, saying she would see if her mother were awake, and willing to see him. This she accordingly did, and returned quickly with an assent; but as she opened the door, she said in a whisper of entreaty, which was not needed in the present instance, however—

"Don't please say anything to her to frighten her; leave me to tell her. I promise to do it."

For an answer, Mr. MacMahon bowed his head, with a grave and gentle smile peculiar to himself, and together they entered the room which to one of them was from henceforward the entrance to the grave, wherein she knew she must soon leave a fond though foolish mother.

Whether Mrs. Castleton was really more aware of her own state than her physician and daughter supposed, or not, it is certain that she now accepted with pleasure and gratitude the visits she had hitherto discouraged, and as day by day the appointed minister to her soul prayed and read beside her, teaching her through his own tenderness of touch, and allusion to her past life

as the proof of a living Faith and Obedience, or as the necessity for seeking it now while there was yet time, she learned to realise how great must be that Divine Love, and how overflowing that Divine Compassion which she had never sought, and so never found strength and comfort in, when suffering from the trials of her married life.

With the knowledge of all *she* had lost and endured in consequence, awoke at last the maternal instinct of fear lest her example, or rather the want of it, should prove the cause of like trouble to her child, and overcoming her natural reserve upon the wretched subject of her married life, she implored Mr. MacMahon to teach her Eleanor what she had neglected to do, and so help her to steer a safer and happier course than her mother had done.

To this appeal he could only answer that he would do all that opportunity permitted, to strengthen her daughter in the knowledge of Him who alone can really help the troubled and

oppressed; but his private opinion of Eleanor was that she was as remarkable for strength and decision of character as her mother for weakness, and that her peculiar trials were not likely to be those which her mother dreaded for her, out of her own experience.

So the days and weeks passed on, bringing that mother by imperceptible degrees nearer to the grave, once so dreaded that the thought was perpetually rejected, but which now, under the comforting sense of a Forgiving Love, for all mistaken sinners who seek, was gradually unfolding itself to the mind of the poor invalid, wearied with life and its cares, as a haven—not of unappreciated rest, but from whence her being would rise with renewed vigour to carry out in active obedience to its demands, the knowledge she had so lately learned of Divine and Universal Love. Dearly as she loved her child, she yet proved no exception to the rule, that as life recedes from us on earth, so fade with it apparently our chief and most engrossing anxieties;

but perhaps the true cause of this is not increased insensibility, but a more perfect confidence in the only Refuge for those we love, through our experience of the Mercy and Comfort we are learning to see and find ourselves, where formerly we thought not of it.

As the end drew near, Mr. Harrington and Ada came to remain while life lasted in Eleanor's mother, and then to carry her back with them for a time to Charlton Rectory. And could this have been a permanent arrangement, she needed not to have felt, as she had complained to Mr. MacMahon, that Mrs. Castleton's death would leave her own a solitary state; but, unfortunately for poor Eleanor, her father's will decreed that in the event of her mother dying before she was of age or married, she was to reside with his brother, an unmarried man older than himself, whom he had appointed her sole guardian. No wonder, then, that she shrank from the change before her, and realised as she had never thought to do, that already happiness was not so secure a pos-

session as in her unthinking youth and spirits she had declared it to be, when the reader first made her acquaintance.

Only a few days after the arrival of Ada and the Rector, Mrs. Castleton was taken from them; so suddenly and peacefully that no one of those who were present could realise her departure at first as any cause for grief. She had done her best, poor mother, before she was called away, to rectify her mistakes, or more correctly speaking, her neglect of training in Eleanor's bringing up, but the latter would not suffer her to lament over that which she had penetration enough to see her mother could not have given to her out of her own incapability. What she had not herself learned she could not teach, and both mother and child recognised that the latter had a strength of character which the former was completely wanting in, and that already in self-control and steady adherence to what *she* thought right, the daughter was many years in advance of the mother.

This was indeed both Eleanor's strength and weakness, and her one point of character of marked resemblance to her father's, but how it availed her for good in after life, or hindered her from advancing in the right path, we must leave for the future to reveal. When she had seen her mother laid in the corner of the cemetery where already her father's grave was made, and had caused it to be planted and cared for, as all such quiet, peaceful homes of our worn-out garments should be, she gladly turned her back on the scene where all she had yet known of happiness and hope had been her's, feeling that she could better bear to lose it out of her life, than live in it, realising day by day what she had lost out of it.

CHAPTER X.

ELEANOR had spent barely six weeks under her uncle's roof when she received a summons from her guardian to take up her residence with him in the dull London square in which he had long lived a solitary existence, uncared for except by an old housekeeper, who by no means approved of the charge laid upon her master, and consequently upon herself also. The former, however, having accepted it, at a time when there seemed to him little chance of his ever being called on to fulfil the duties of Eleanor's guardian, was not able now to avoid the obligations he had incurred, and while heartily regretting the fact, was yet wise enough to feel that both for him and his old servant it

would be better to get over at once the invasion of their domestic arrangements involved by them.

Her uncle wrote, therefore, so positively to Eleanor on the subject of her immediate compliance with her father's wishes, that Mr. Harrington decided to take her up to her future home two days after, greatly as he and Ada regretted the necessity; and none the less because it had arisen from her father's distrust of his wife's care of their child, which had extended to her family, between whom and himself there had naturally existed little cordiality of feeling; for while fully admitting their daughter's and sister's failings as a wife, yet knowing them to be the mistakes of a weak but not wilful character, it is not to be wondered at that they shrank from witnessing her unhappiness, and found it hard to maintain kindly intercourse with him who caused it, by irritability and impatience which blinded him to the fact that his wife wished to please him, but knew not how.

When the Rector expressed to Eleanor his

opinion and intention regarding her journey to London, it seemed to her as if life and all its hopes were being gradually blotted out, as she had hitherto known them. She had flattered herself that her guardian's silence during the first few weeks after her mother's death, added to his having made no allusion after the funeral—which he attended—to her future residence with him, augured well for the hope she had begun to indulge, of being permitted to remain with the relatives to whom only, now, all her natural affections clung, and with whom she rightly felt lay her best chance of present happiness, and of growth in that womanly improvement of character which, under Ada's gentle influence, she knew would prove a comparatively easy lesson. But Eleanor had to learn, as we all have to do, that it is through "hardness," and not through ease, that wisdom teaches her children those lessons which are to endure in their effect beyond this stage of our existence; else how could we trust ourselves to prove our choice and hold

steadfastly to it, when tried by circumstances adverse to the practice of that which seemed so attractive and easy under soothing and favourable influences as to delude us into the frequent mistake of its forming a part of ourselves, from the force of habit?

It is true, no doubt, concerning foolish or wrong habits that "use is second nature," but it is not so in those which counteract our natural tendencies, and it requires very little observation on our part to perceive that, while a bad habit once established is almost impossible of eradication by ordinary means, and never without great labour and repeated backslidings, a good one, on the contrary, will fall into easy disuse and forgetfulness, before a very moderate share of such influence as is to be found in unexpected and unusual difficulties to its continuance, or, more often still, in careless example around us.

On hearing her fate announced by her uncle, Eleanor required all her usual determination to hide the bitter disappointment she experienced until she was alone with her cousin, before whom

she threw aside all self-restraint, sure of her sympathy and comprehension.

The two girls cried together until, feeling somewhat relieved in consequence, they could speak without tears of the future, and deliberate upon its probable effect on the life of one, at least, of them; and having sauntered out into the garden while thus discoursing, they seated themselves once more as nearly as possible where Eleanor had overheard and interrupted Almeria's dissertation on her want of happiness.

"How strange it is," said Eleanor, after reminding Ada of this, "that people should have such different ideas of happiness. Now, to me, life here with you and my uncle in this dear, pretty place, has always looked to me as the happiest possible existence. If I might only now take Almeria's place, how happy I should be. It seems to *me* that you have everything a girl can, or at least *ought* to want. I never could understand Almeria's discontent, and now less than ever."

"It is not easy to do so," replied Ada, "but

then I am convinced that no one person can judge for another as regards what is necessary for their happiness. Also, I am tolerably sure that the great obstacle to happiness, where there is none outwardly, is to be found in the temptation not to like a thing simply because you ought to do so.'

"I know what you mean," said Eleanor, "but it does not apply to your state in life, surely. Of course no one would expect you or Allie to like everything in your lives, but that is quite different from feeling that your life itself in its position was hateful to you."

"No, it is as true of life itself as of the little things which occur in it, I think," replied her cousin. "For instance, you, dear, are an example just now of what I mean, and I also, I am afraid. We know nothing of the life you are going to, and have no particulars on which to form a judgment, and yet we both shrink from it, as from something unhappy, and dreadful as compared with this, which you like all the better because it is denied to you."

"Do I?" said Eleanor. "Well, perhaps so, but I always thought it such a happy home, even when I could come here as often as we liked."

"Yes, but it was never the place in which your *duty* lay as Almeria's did," replied Ada, "and, therefore, I think you have never had a chance of knowing exactly how it would seem to you, if this was the case."

"I don't believe it would make an atom of difference," cried Eleanor. "Why should it? It would be just as pretty and comfortable, and everything in and about it would be the same; and what I like in it now, I should like doubly if I felt I might do so, without the fear of having to leave it."

"In that case, you might possibly like it too much, for you know we *must* leave it sooner or later; but the fact is that, as far as I can see," replied Ada, "we are mostly placed not in the position we think we should have liked best, and this comes almost to the same thing as that it is harder generally to like your own duty, and

where it places you, than any other duties and position."

"Then, if you think so, you must have felt it, for I don't believe you have lived long enough yet, or seen enough of other people to know it only through them. Now tell me, Ada, you are very quiet always about where you get your wisdom from, but it did not come to you naturally, I am sure, any more than to the rest of us;" and as she spoke Eleanor looked eagerly into the face of her cousin, who had shown unmistakable signs of confusion and consciousness.

"You won't get me to tell more than I choose," she said, in answer, smiling, although somewhat embarrassed, "but if it is a shame in your eyes to believe that this place, dear and nice as it is, does not hold all that even I think necessary for actual happiness, why, you will have to wonder at me as you do at Almeria, for I don't mind owning that I also find it hard to believe that duty would not have been easier to me under different circumstances."

Eleanor looked enquiringly at her cousin's flushed cheeks and unusually excited look, but she respected as much as she loved her, and forbore to question her, returning again to her own future and what it might probably contain of trial and dreariness. The very idea of living cooped up in London, where she could never be free as she had been, was dreadful to her, and added to the fact that, so far as she knew, there was no companion for her but an old man in her new home, we can all imagine it to have been but natural for her to feel that just now her "lines" had not fallen in pleasant places. Talk as they would, however, and long for what might have been, both girls had too much sense to indulge beyond this one half-hour in such useless and weakening discontents. Ada set to work, out of her own experience of duty made the happiness of life, to cheer Eleanor with the certainty that she might if she would find the same change possible in her own case; but the latter, who knew still nothing of the actual amount of trial through

which her cousin had passed, though she did not contradict her, apparently derived very little hope or desire of ever settling down in the home destined for her, with the same amount of satisfaction and interest evidently experienced now by Ada in her life and surroundings.

Later on in the same day, they sat together while Mr. Harrington took his evening after-dinner doze, and from themselves their talk passed to Almeria, now the wife of that very Mr. Leslie concerning her treatment of whom Eleanor had remarked the proud disgust which had been altogether absent from her manner to Sir John Mowbray.

"Is Almeria happy in London, do you think?" was the enquiry which had followed naturally on the recollection that there, although separated by three miles of streets, she would at least be within reach of one cousin. "She never writes to me, and since poor dear mother's illness increased I had no time to write more letters than I was obliged."

Ada did not reply at first, but after a moment's pause, she said, "Eleanor, dear, I know you are not fond of poor Allie, and, therefore, are inclined to think the worst of her, and if you were not going where you will be sure to meet her, I would not say what I believe to be the truth, and that is, that she is far more unhappy in her present life than she ever was here."

"Is she really?" exclaimed Eleanor. "But why? Is not Mr. Leslie kind to her? However, that perhaps would not matter so much to Almeria as to most wives, but surely she has got the very things she most complained of wanting here. I have always taken for granted she was satisfied now."

"I wish she were," replied Ada with a sigh, "but as you will soon see for yourself that she is not, there is no use in hiding the fact."

"Well," remarked Eleanor slowly and reflectively, "it always puzzled me why she married Mr. Leslie at all, for if ever a girl behaved as if she despised and hated a man, she did to him;

but I thought she seemed all right at her wedding, and if she wanted devotion from a husband she has certainly got it, for of all the idiotic lovers I ever saw, Mr. Leslie was the worst. I declare if any man ever were to attempt to treat me so absurdly, I should despise him then and there. Men have no business to make such geese of girls; besides which, *I* know that when they do beforehand they are pretty nearly sure to be tyrants afterwards. Poor mamma has often told me how delighted papa used to seem with all she said and did when they were engaged, and after they were married nothing pleased him. It seemed, she said, as if he wanted her to be quite different, and all the things he used to say he liked and admired in her when she was a girl, he used to ridicule and scold her for when they were married. Everything seems to me all upside down, somehow, as soon as people marry, and I hope if ever I am silly enough to wish to be a wife, that I shall find a husband I can *respect*; then I will let him off all the foolish love-making which means nothing."

"Not always," interposed Ada. "You will find Mr. Leslie more than ever devoted to Almeria, and as 'idiotic,' as you call it, as he always was."

"Poor man!" said Eleanor, "what a pity it is that in marriage one always seems to make the other uncomfortable. Ada," she added suddenly, "why don't you marry? I believe you would just be the happy medium as a wife, and every one knows you could if you liked."

Ada coloured, but retorted laughingly, "When you can find me a happy medium as a husband, perhaps I will, but until then you ought to approve of my avoiding the risks you have been speaking of."

"One question more, and then I must go and pack, for I have so much to look over and sort before I settle what to take and what to leave with you," said Eleanor sadly. "Tell me, Ada, if you don't mind, was Uncle Harrington's marriage with your mother happier than that of my father and mother?"

Before Ada could answer, both girls were

startled and alarmed by the Rector's voice, replying, "I heard your last question, Eleanor, and will answer it for Ada, who knows little more than yourself. Her mother was one who could have made any man what she pleased. She was my blessing and strength while she lived, and could I have lived without her up to the standard she always kept before me in herself, I should have less on my conscience of duties imperfectly performed than I feel now. It is hard, my dears, at least I feel it so," ended the good Rector, with a quaver in his voice, "for a man to live as completely out of self as a good woman does."

"Dear father," said Ada, taking his hand, "if all men were as kind as you, the world would be happier than it is."

"Yes," rejoined Eleanor, while tears sprang to her eyes, "I wish I could be sure, uncle, of finding in my guardian one half so good as you." And with the gentle but sincere flattery Mr. Harrington suffered himself to be cheered, and

the little party dispersed till tea-time, without more conversation, only Eleanor could not help thinking to herself, "I wonder why men, who are supposed to be so superior to us, seem always to want some one to keep them straight," for she had a clear recollection of a speech made by her father on his death-bed, and accidentally overheard by her as a child, to the effect that if he had had a better wife he should have been a better man; and now here was her uncle, a clergyman, and a man who had married a wife considerably younger than himself, speaking as if he also had depended on her in some way for the influence necessary to urge him to a strict fulfilment of his duties; while, on the other hand, she never remembered to have heard a wife excused, or her mother even excuse herself, on the plea that her husband did not help her to do as she ought.

But wiser heads, or at any rate more experienced ones, than Eleanor's, have puzzled over this enigma and arrived at no satisfactory solu-

tion of it. Yet I hope before this story ends to show a light which may guide those who care to understand, to the clue through which they may find its explanation.

Two days after the conversation above narrated, Eleanor, accompanied by her uncle and Ada, entered her future home, there to remain until she left it for a husband's roof, or voluntarily when the law emancipated her from control.

We have said that the house of Mr. Castleton was in a dull London square, than which nothing but a dull *street* can be more trying, to a country girl accustomed to enjoy without restraint the sweet and ever-varying phases of nature; for it is a fact, although not seen or understood by all, that there is no season in the life of God's works when they are without beauty and interest, and if they sometimes fail to please the eyes that can see nothing so agreeable to them as man and *his* works, at least they neither pall on the sated senses of enjoyment, or disappoint the seeker after sympathy. But to return to our poor for-

lorn Eleanor. She and her companions were met by the aforesaid old servant at the door, who made a poor attempt to look pleased at their arrival, and conducted them into a room on the ground floor, furnished comfortably, but more like a library than a dining-room, for which it was also used, and where a respectable lunch was already laid out.

The next moment a door opening into an adjoining room admitted a small, white-headed old man, scrupulously clean and neat in appearance, who briskly but somewhat nervously saluted Eleanor, with, "Ah, Eleanor, how are you? Thought you would come by this train. Very glad to see you. Sit down, sit down, my dear." Then turning to Mr. Harrington and Ada, he extended the same invitation to them; and very soon all four were busily discussing their lunch, talking and laughing as if there were no sorrowful parting waiting for them when they had finished. And happy it is for us poor mortals that to a certain extent we never quite lose the un-

thinking carelessness of youth in the present, and forget in it for a little space the coming evils, as they look to us, of the future. But perhaps if we knew more we should see that childhood is wiser in some things than age, and that the evils of the future are better than the carelessness of the present.

CHAPTER XI.

IN a beautifully furnished but tiny drawing-room, in the extreme west of London, sat Almeria Leslie, more beautiful than ever in form, feature, and complexion, and equally remarkable, as formerly, for the proud and discontented expression which alone hindered her claim to beauty of the highest kind. She was alone and unoccupied, and if her thoughts might be guessed from her face, they were of no cheerful nature or pleasant subject, but just now we are not admitted to see them. It is nearly the hour for the first afternoon delivery of the post, and although Mrs. Leslie has no special expectations connected with it, it is a diversion, apparently, to watch for the postman, for, just

now, that is what she appears to be doing. He comes at last in sight, and gives his well-known rat-tat at the door of Mr. Leslie's house, and soon after a neat little page brings his mistress a note on a small silver salver, so it is easy to perceive that Almeria has succeeded in obtaining a good deal of what she wished for in life, and although the domain over which she rules is very tiny, it is also very complete, and the rule she sways is as regal as if its possessor inhabited Windsor Castle.

She took the note idly, as if it were not likely to contain anything very interesting, but, seeing her sister's writing, her eyes brightened, and she opened the envelope with far more eagerness than she would have done three years ago; for if marriage had improved her in no other way, it had, at any rate, endeared to her the home she had wearied of, and the life she had despised.

The note was, as we know, from Ada, who had forgotten to send it the day before starting on their unexpected journey to town, and it was

not observed until too late the night before, for the post, but being sent early in the morning, Mr. Harrington calculated correctly that it would reach Almeria just in time to stop her from leaving home in the afternoon. Ada proposed that she and her father should dine with the Leslies, sleeping at an hotel near; and as the hour for their arrival was not far off, Almeria immediately rang for her cook, and ordered what she considered necessary additions to their every-day dinner, and then waited impatiently for her guests. They did not keep her waiting long, having felt, as poor Eleanor also was bound to confess, that the sooner she was left to take possession of the place assigned her in her new home the better, and that to defer the moment of parting was only imposing on her guardian's patience, without benefiting her; so, with full hearts and sad looks, the father and daughter left her and pursued their way to Almeria's home.

Although the latter had been married now

nearly two years and a half, it was very seldom that she had received her father and sister as her guests, excepting in the way they now proposed to come. Her house was too small to supply more than one spare room, and the pleasure and comfort of a long visit from Ada was denied her by the impossibility to the latter of leaving her father alone. In this, as in everything else, Mr. Harrington had no thought of unkindness, but simply of his own wishes. *He* could not bear to be left alone, and, therefore, it never occurred to him as possible or right that he should be so left, and two days away from his own garden or fireside at a time being as much as he could endure with cheerfulness, he fully believed that Ada felt as he did, or, if he had any doubt on the subject, he wisely forbore to ask any questions, knowing that in matters which are essential to the comfort of one, while both are supposed to take the same view, that one may enjoy his or her own way with a quiet conscience, and that, under these circumstances, it is unwise to make

too many inquiries of others, whose answers might convey an amount of information, compared with which, former "ignorance was bliss."

For her own sake, however, Ada did not regret her closely tied existence as an interference with a long stay at Almeria's home, which contained little beyond herself to interest or occupy an active, healthy-minded girl, accustomed to think of and live for others, but to Almeria herself it was a great disappointment, for she was not less disposed than before her marriage, to talk where she ought to have worked, and to complain where she should have borne in silence, and it was plain that she could not make use of her husband as a sympathising listener to complaints which no loving wife would have felt, much less expressed.

Ada and Mr. Harrington found Almeria so excited by the sudden pleasure of welcoming them, that at first they were disposed to hope it was a sign of greater content than they had yet seen in her, but these hopes were doomed to dis-

appointment before the evening closed. Frederick Leslie's appearance, a few minutes before dinner, brought back the usual look of proud and indifferent weariness which had become habitual to his wife, and without which he would not have known her. He came up the flight of stairs which led to the drawing-room, with unusual briskness, not because he knew of any arrival (and he was attached both to his father and sister-in-law) but because he hoped he bore with him that which would bring a smile, at any rate, for one evening, to the face of his dearly-loved but unappreciative wife. Entering the room, however, his eyes lighted on Mr. Harrington, ensconced in a comfortable chair near the window, and amusing himself with the daily paper, while Ada and Almeria were upstairs preparing for dinner. His son-in-law gazed at him almost in alarm, for having but one thought connected with him—his wife—his first idea was the fear that something concerning her, in his absence, must have brought her father up to town. The

latter's amused smile, however, at his astonishment dispelled the young man's anxiety almost before he was aware of it, and the two greeted each other cordially, for any one belonging to Almeria was kindly regarded by her husband for her sake, and Mr. Harrington had known nothing of his son-in-law but that which compelled his regard and esteem.

In a few minutes their talk concerning Eleanor, and the cause connected with her of Mr. Harrington's presence in his daughter's house, put out of her husband's recollection the fact which he had been hastening to communicate to her, and not knowing how far the presence of Ada and her father might interfere with its accomplishment, he went quietly upstairs to his dressing-room, determined to put by his news, and accompanying proposal for his wife's amusement, until he could speak to her in private.

When, therefore, the married pair met in the drawing-room in Ada's presence, Almeria knew nothing of that which—if she had known it—

might have induced her to receive her husband with a little less indifference than her manner evinced, when, after welcoming Ada, he turned to kiss his wife as usual, saying, as he did so—

"Well, darling, and how have you been amusing yourself to-day?"

"In no way," curtly replied Almeria; "at least," she added more graciously, looking at her sister, "until I got Ada's note, and that gave me something pleasant to think of."

"Ah," replied her husband, ignoring her manner to himself, "perhaps by and by we shall find something else as well to please you."

"I dare say," she answered wearily; then, turning to Ada, whose eyes were looking surprised reproach at her, she continued, "Frederick is so enthusiastic over every little thing, that I have ceased to expect anything from his mysterious hints; I am always disappointed if I do, because he and I, unluckily, don't care for the same things, or count them equally as pleasures."

"All right," said her husband cheerfully, "my news will keep."

"And so," rejoined Almeria, "will my curiosity. Now, Fred, take Ada down to dinner."

While, now, the four proceed to discuss that important item in the daily life of every civilised and educated human being, we will inform ourselves of the process which transformed Almeria Harrington into Mrs. Frederick Leslie, and how it fell out that she discovered, when too late, her mistake in supposing that duty, or life as *she* called it, would be easy when it was removed elsewhere than in her girlhood's home, and under the circumstances of marriage, instead of those which belonged to the lot of the daughter of a country clergyman.

When her father, with unusual decision, insisted on her accepting the invitation drawn forth by his own appeal, Almeria determined that if she complied with his wishes in going for change to a couple of "tiresome old people," she would

follow her own devices, and make the most of any chance of amusement that might fall in her way, according to her good pleasure.

She was bitterly angry with Sir John Mowbray, for not having secured to her the realisation of the hopes his admiration had raised in her, and which had so unsettled her already dissatisfied mind, that she felt almost anything would be preferable to another year of village duties and society, with the silent—but not the less keenly felt — reproach conveyed by her sister's useful and contented life under the same outward conditions as her own.

Almeria, therefore, continued the plan which she had all the years of her childhood at home, and her short girlhood in it, persevered in, without learning that it was the chief and only enemy to her happiness: I mean that of fighting against outward circumstances, and submitting to inward faults. Had she reversed this order of things, her story would have had a different lesson for others, and a less stormy experience

for herself. But like many other young and consciously gifted girls, she was foolish enough to look for happiness in the circumstances of her life, instead of in the use she made of them, and consequently thought herself ill-used because this plan did not answer by satisfying her requirements.

Let us follow her now to the termination of her stay with the kind but rather prim old people with whom she has spent the last six weeks: which time, although passed in a dull country town—a far duller place to most people than a country village—had not proved altogether unproductive of amusement to Almeria Harrington. Very shortly after her arrival in it she made acquaintance with the family of the principal medical man in the neighbourhood, whose eldest son was a curate in the town which had for him the misfortune to contain Almeria as a guest. This young man was in no respect her inferior, being singularly handsome, equally well born with herself, and far beyond her in

this respect, that he realised what his duty was, and earnestly strove to do it. Without following them through all the details of an acquaintance ripening into intimacy on her part, and admiration into love on his, it is sufficient for the purpose of our story to know, that ere Almeria left her temporary home, her lover—as he sincerely was—had written to her father for permission to address and win his daughter, without having first tested the sincerity of that return of his preference which Almeria, contrary to her intended and usual plan of action, had betrayed.

Henry Causton was indeed little likely to suspect any woman of deceiving him in regard to the impression he had made; not because he was a vain and boastful man, but because he had been so accustomed to all that was good and true in his own home, that he was not prepared to find the reverse in a young and beautiful girl whose account of herself and her surroundings proved, as he thought, her fitness to share his lot and occupations: and his mother had com-

mitted the one mistake — so common among mothers—of not warning her son, that while his own home was, happily, an example of what all should be, it was very far from being so in reality, and that out of it he would meet with the world as it is, not as it ought to be—two phases which require very opposite methods of comprehension and treatment.

It is not to be wondered at if the admiration and love of this handsome, good, and very popular young curate was a delightful and soothing balm, most acceptable to Almeria's angry and disappointed feelings; but strange to say, although aware that he at least was in earnest, and willingly accepting the devotion he freely offered without any attempt at concealment from the envious eyes of the unmarried ladies of his parish and neighbourhood, Almeria was as anxious to keep him from speaking openly to her of his love as she had been to hurry Sir John Mowbray into an avowal of his. For while she was quite aware that Henry Causton's hand-

some face, refined manner, and devoted attachment had roused in her a consciousness of feelings which might very well, if she had chosen it, have been a suitable return for his, she yet never lost sight of the fact that marriage with him would involve too many of the same things which were so distasteful in her present existence, for her to think seriously of accepting any proposition of the kind from him—and yet she liked him, or the interest he afforded her, too well to lose one half hour of the latter until forced to do so.

It was in consequence of her evident anxiety to avoid anything like an avowal of his love, while she yet made him feel that she was far from being indifferent to him, that Henry Causton determined on the step he finally took; and the evening of the day which witnessed her return home, considerably revived in her good opinion of herself, and of her powers of captivation, carried a letter from her adorer to her father, which, while laying claim to no open

permission on her part as an excuse, yet intimated very plainly the hope of the writer that he had rightly interpreted Almeria's feelings as coinciding with his own, although he felt that there was some reason why she had always checked him or changed the conversation—apparently unintentionally—whenever he was attempting to approach the subject.

In the innocence of his heart it occurred to him that her father might have higher views in marriage for so unusually attractive a daughter, and the thought that his beloved Almeria might be aware of this, and fear to excite the parental anger by engaging herself, without leave, to a curate with very moderate present means, and no very large expectations in the future, determined him to lay honestly before Mr. Harrington his exact position, trusting to his own fidelity and Almeria's fancied affection to work on his desired father-in-law's hard heart, for future if not present permission to seek and claim as a wife the girl he already loved so much.

When Mr. Harrington received and had read the young man's letter, he sent for Almeria and put it into her hands, remarking—

"I ought not, perhaps, to be surprised that you should have left me to hear so much first from Mr. Causton; no doubt you have told Ada, but my child need not have doubted my interest or wish to give her all she wanted."

"But, papa," cried Almeria, her cheeks burning with mingled shame and annoyance—for it flashed across her conscience that she might have gone far enough to make it difficult to rid herself of an over-fond and determined lover—"it is a mistake; I don't want anything of the sort."

"Then what is the meaning of Mr. Causton's venturing to write so certainly of your feelings, as if I and my consent alone remained to be won?"

"I am sure I don't know; he had no business to do anything of the kind; and after all, papa," she added saucily, "it was your fault for sending me where I met him."

Her father looked at her gravely and steadily as she spoke, but he had too long spoiled her with foolish indulgence to dare to enter into anything approaching to serious blame, and therefore dismissed her with the hope that she would never again give him so unpleasant a task as that which lay before him.

"And remember, Almeria," he added, "it is the last as well as the first time that I will do it, even for you; the next time you draw on yourself an offer you do not value, you must refuse it yourself, or make the best of the bargain."

Almeria, who had never before seen her father so near anger with herself, was too astonished to reply, and suffered him to bid her leave him to his task, obeying him also, before it dawned upon her how very badly he was treating her. She repaired at once to Ada, to whom she gave her own version of the affair, only repressing the vivid description into which she had been beguiled by vanity the night before, of Mr. Caus-

ton's handsome face and excessive devotion to herself; declaring now that she never dreamed of his venturing to propose marriage to her, being as he was, a poor curate, with little chance of preferment.

He, poor young man, accepted his dismissal as best he might, not, indeed, believing that Almeria had willingly sanctioned it, but giving to a "stern sire" the full benefit of the transaction, and of his belief that he had shielded his own worldliness under pretence of "his daughter's having mistaken the impression given by her acceptance of Mr. Causton's attentions, which she had never imagined to have any serious meaning." So locking up his present disappointment and future hopes carefully in his own breast, Henry Causton consoled himself with redoubled work among the poor and suffering in his district, and strove in the observation of their quiet acceptance of want and troubles of all kinds, to learn the lesson of endurance so easy to preach to others, but so hard to make ourselves perfect in by

practice, when our turn comes to suffer and not to teach.

And he succeeded better than he hoped for, as all do who are willing to believe that God knows best; although I do not say that it was very soon after this that he loved and finally married one far beyond Almeria in station, but who, while wanting her great beauty, knew as she did not, that there is a higher post even here to be gained than the worldly one so coveted by the Rector of Charlton's daughter. In consequence, she was far better suited to marry a "poor curate," but it yet remains to be seen what are the respective positions in that lasting social scale which will be fixed as eternity itself, and in which it is doubtful if humble fulfilment of daily duties will find the lowest place.

Almeria could not but feel, after this, that her father no longer believed so implicitly in her as he had done. The truth was he was puzzled, both by her evident disappointment as regarded Sir John Mowbray, and now still more by her

wilful flirtation, as he thought it, with Henry Causton, caring nothing for him; and just as he had formerly sought domestic peace by despatching his youngest daughter to the care of a schoolmistress, so now he began devoutly to wish that some eligible husband would present himself, and relieve him of all remaining responsibility concerning one with whom he felt himself quite unable to cope. Nor had he long to wait. His own curate was as ungainly a specimen of his class as Henry Causton was the reverse, and although he had always kept at a very humble distance from both girls, Almeria lost no opportunity of showing him how repugnant to her was all association with him; but he was too good a man to resent this, and too humble to feel hurt by it, and in consequence he declined to be driven away as some men might have been, by the discomforts even a girl can create for those infinitely her real superiors, when the insolence of youth, beauty, and discontent urges her to place her own likes and dislikes before every other consideration.

Much, however, as Almeria disliked Mr. Lewis, and resented the admiration which no one could honestly withhold from her personal beauty, she began to regret her persistently ungracious treatment of him when it was whispered that a cousin, who had often paid him flying visits, and who was now invalided from an accident, had inherited a comfortable income from a well-to-do maiden aunt, and was coming for a longer time than usual to Mr. Lewis's small but comfortable lodgings in the village. Now when this young man, Frederick Leslie by name, had on former occasions accompanied his unpopular cousin to the Rectory, it seemed as if Almeria had determinedly extended her dislike of one to the other, and she so persistently snubbed young Leslie at the first instance that he retired altogether on the occasion of later visits from exposing himself to the discomfort of a like experience again.

But when he appeared, as he now did, under different circumstances in the eyes of Almeria, and for the matter of that not in her's only, somehow the individual himself seemed changed. It

was wonderful how much better looking Mr. Leslie with one thousand pounds a year of his own was, than "that stupid Mr. Lewis's cousin" had been the year before, when, so far as any one knew, he was worth nothing. However, this is a phenomenon which is well known to most of us, and although Frederick Leslie was no Adonis like Henry Causton, and had only a very small portion of Sir John Mowbray's income and no title, yet it was very evident to Almeria now that he was a bright, honest, pleasant-looking gentleman, and that he had a far better figure than Sir John, who was rather round-shouldered and slight, while he was superior to Henry Causton in strength and muscular activity. All this Almeria honestly perceived for the first time, and that she did so at last rejoiced her sister's heart, for she had fully understood Mr. Leslie's apparent devotion to herself after his first experience of Almeria's rebuffs, and knew better than he did even, that he waited but for the most trifling encouragement to show his real adoration for her

beautiful sister. Ada also had begun to realise that the latter would never add to the comfort of their home, or be contented in it herself, and she fully believed that in marriage with a high-principled, honest-hearted man as she had reason to believe the curate's cousin to be, lay Almeria's best chance of true and lasting happiness. Whether her sister was likely to make Frederick Leslie happy, was a question which did not suggest itself even to Ada, so certain are we all inclined to be that our own belongings must be an indisputable gain to others; and it is curious how this conviction can co-exist with a feeling of something like relief, when a troublesome piece of human goods is deposited safely under the care of those to whom we are satisfied of having supplied them with a valuable treasure.

CHAPTER XII.

IT would be unfair to Almeria Harrington to suffer her to lie under the imputation, hinted at in the preceding chapter, of having changed her opinion and conduct regarding Frederick Leslie, solely on the score of his improved worldly position. We must remember that, as only the cousin of the despised and ungainly curate, the Rector's daughter had not hitherto vouchsafed him sufficient attention to be a fair judge, or an unprejudiced observer of him in any way. Her ambition was mainly to get out of and above the dull middle-class existence, inseparable from the fact of her being a member of a country clergyman's family of moderate means, and living in such retirement as a distance

of ten miles from the cathedral town, and two from a railway station, implies in these days of universal running about and excitement—there being, also, no military depôt or fashionable sea-side place within a day's journey.

Until Sir John Harrington appeared, Almeria had contented herself with vague and ambitious longings. He came and raised within her the sudden hope that here was all and more than she had hoped for within her grasp; but, as we know, she had as foolishly and suddenly relinquished this hope, as she had too readily entertained it, and though Henry Causton's personal attractions had won from her, in spite of herself, feelings which Sir John's admiration had failed to arouse, she could not fling away all at once the longings for a life which she believed impossible in the case of marriage with him, and she quietly, but determinedly, crushed under this worldly ambition that love which, being more natural, and therefore more safe, might have taught her to lower her ambition in this

world for the sake of that which would have a more abiding value in one which will not vanish.

But the two experiences and excitements she had lately gone through, had disturbed Almeria to such an extent that she became a prey to an amount of restless discontent which never exists long without bringing about some untoward and foolish event; and this, in her case, was the acceptance of an offer of marriage from Mr. Leslie, who, emboldened by her change of manner —although, in fairness to her, it must be conceded that it amounted only to ordinary civility— and undeterred by the curate's warning, laid at her feet himself and his possessions, both present and future. Now, so far as the reader has yet heard, the income of Frederick Leslie, although sufficiently tempting to an ordinary daughter of an ordinary clergyman, was not sufficient as a bait in the case before us, where unusual beauty existed in the daughter, and moderate but comfortable private means enabled Mr. Harrington

to give his children the quiet luxuries of life, without feeling that a day might come, when, with him, they would also lose the comforts of a refined and easy position. But Frederick Leslie was also heir to another comfortably established maiden aunt, at whose death he would receive another thousand a year, with a small but lovely country residence near Wingfield, in the County of Surrey; and of this he duly informed Almeria, in an apparently incidental fashion, a few days before he made her aware of the extent of his love for her.

When, therefore, this took place, she was sufficiently alive to the advantages of a marriage with Mr. Leslie to be able to perceive that, to any other girl but herself—who was heart-whole—he was, in all respects, an eligible and desirable husband; and when she could forget his connection with the ungainly curate—who was, however, a man of good birth, but plain and shy to a painful degree—she neither could nor wished to deny that he was fit to mate with her-

self. His bright, open countenance, curly brown hair, and handsome blue eyes gave him an attraction beyond that which many better looking men could command, but his features were irregular, and his complexion reddened and tanned by the out-of-door existence he delighted in, and consequent exposure to all weathers.

He was a gentleman in manner, because he was one in mind, but he was certainly deficient in that ultra refinement of speech and habits which distinguishes the fine gentleman as completely as the fine lady, and which arises, not from refinement of feeling, but from an adherence to fashion and its requirements, among the would-be, if they are not by birth already, "upper ten thousand."

Almeria, however, had too much regard for her own importance to give at once the assent she meant to give finally, to Mr. Leslie's proposal, for while she had certainly grown not to dislike him, she had not an atom of real regard for him, and considered him merely as a means

to an end, which she was bent on accomplishing. She desired him, therefore, to give her a week for her reply, stipulating that he should leave the place for that time, and openly telling him that she had no feeling of love for him in return for his passionate expressions of devotion to herself. Like a great many other foolish men, Frederick Leslie declared that he had love enough for both, and that he would be content to win her's by degrees, and a great deal more of the same kind of nonsense, which sounds and seems so delightfully easy a task before marriage, but which is so lamentably difficult afterwards, that it is beyond human patience and skill altogether.

During the week she claimed thus, before finally releasing herself by her own act from a distasteful life, Almeria's thoughts were busy with many things; but although she could talk too much of the trials and grievances of her life when these could be laid on other people's shoulders, she was always singularly reticent in

matters concerning which she had formed a determination to adopt and carry out a certain plan. And this is mostly true of all *really* wilful people. It is not those who talk boldly and extravagantly of their determinations and intentions who generally accomplish them, but those who keep these feelings to themselves, and mature their plans, while others are ignorant that they have any.

The sisters were not, as may be imagined, drawn more closely together by the events recorded. Almeria shunned all discussion, because she knew she could not otherwise conceal from Ada her utter want of affection for the man whose proposal she was pretending to consider; while Ada, although delighted at the prospect of so suitable a marriage as it seemed to her for her sister, and misled by the unusual civility of the latter to her lover, to believe that she had happily transferred to him her short-lived fancy for Sir John Mowbray, yet felt a barrier between them of which she had

never been conscious before, and which she recognised as impossible for herself to destroy, because she did not perceive or understand its cause. In the meantime Mr. Lewis had exhausted all his stock of warnings and assurances of mistake on his cousin, for the purpose of convincing him that he was throwing away himself and his love on a girl whose pride and haughty selfishness would never suffer her to give him any adequate return. Had Frederick Leslie been a less good-tempered man, he would have resented this useless though well-meant and really true representation of Mr. Lewis; as it was, he only laughed, saying that he never knew before how jealous his cousin was, and promising to show him some day, in his own happiness, the best contradiction of his words—for although doomed to a week's delay in hearing his fate, somehow this formerly retiring lover had no real doubt as to his success.

He had told Almeria beforehand of his expectations in the future, not because he wished or

thought of being married *for* them, but because he had an intuitive conviction that she would not give way to love in the case of a man of small means or humble position, and to him she was such a queen, that he felt it not only justifiable but right she should refuse to come down from the place to which God's gifts of beauty and intellect seemed to give her a natural claim. So that she would love him *with* his money, he never thought of blaming or doubting her for not doing so without it. And as he, poor fellow, was prepared, he thought, to be satisfied with any pittance of affection she might see fit to dole out to him, if only she would give him leave to love and take care of her, it cannot be denied that he deserved almost as much blame for taking her on these terms, as Almeria for accepting him. The end, however, was that she did accept him, and, nothing interfering to delay their union, the following March found Almeria Harrington Frederick Leslie's wife.

CHAPTER XIII.

RETURNING now to the party assembled at the Leslies' dinner-table, we find nothing to show us the cause of that cloud of discontent which hovered on Almeria's countenance at the sight of her husband. He was improved in every respect, and it would have been hard for others to detect in him anything likely to jar on the most sensitively refined nature of any woman who loved or cared for him. Yet to everything he said, his wife either took exception or showed the most complete indifference, causing Ada to wonder what kind of meal dinner must be without a third party to relieve the discomfort of such apparent want of friendship even between this married pair.

Turning after a pause, occasioned by one of

these rebuffs, to his father-in-law, Mr. Leslie observed—

"You will stay with us a few days, I hope?"

"Only till to-morrow afternoon," replied the Rector; "I must spend Saturday at home."

"But could you not leave Ada a little longer? I am sure Almeria would be thankful to have her," continued the fond but unwise husband, ignoring the fact that his wife had not attempted to second his hospitable invitation.

"Well, I can't say; she must do as she likes," answered the poor man, inwardly trembling lest Ada should take advantage of the permission and remain behind.

"I shall like to return then," she interposed, just as her brother-in-law was preparing to speak, "for I know you will miss me more than Almeria will, papa."

"How little you know of the truth, if you think that," replied her sister; "but I shall not press you to stay on papa's account."

Her tone was so markedly mournful, that while Ada looked surprised and uneasy, her husband,

after a moment's awkward silence, said with an attempt at passing the matter lightly over—

"Not very complimentary to me, is it? But she does not mean all she says."

"Do I not?" retorted his wife, "I think you are mistaken there; but when a man does not wish to be convinced, he takes good care not to see what would convince any more reasonable creature than himself."

For one moment even her adoring husband seemed likely to join her in the passionate anger with which she spoke, some sudden recollection having apparently swept away all natural reserve and respect for each other in her mind; but he controlled himself, and as his wife at this moment rose with her sister to leave the room, he said quietly, but pointedly, to her as he held the door open for her to pass out—

"Almeria, will you be satisfied with your father's judgment, if it agrees with mine? It would be a satisfaction to me to consult him."

"You can do exactly as you please," she answered, "but you know my wishes already."

He did indeed, poor man, and often wished they agreed a little better with his own, for experience had already taught him that there was no peace for him, unless his liege lady had everything her own way. But just now there existed between them a feud of a more than usually serious nature, arising out of Mr. Leslie's objection to an intimacy lately formed by his wife with a certain lady of fashion, who did not bear the best possible character as a wife and mother, but who devoted herself, with an energy unknown to her in her domestic relations, to making her house a pleasant rendezvous for all the idle men and women of her acquaintance, and, if truth must be told, more than one husband and father had had cause to regret the introduction of his belongings to the influence of this elegant but not admirable leader.

Indulgent to folly as Frederick Leslie had hitherto been to his wife's freaks and vagaries, he was no fool really, and he knew better than she did the dangers of that world which she in her ignorance was longing to plunge into. As

yet her love of admiration, amusement, and idleness had not been gratified to the extent she had looked forward to, when she insisted before her marriage on a home in London, contrary to all her husband's tastes, and knowing that it would effectually deprive him of all the occupations most congenial to him. But who could gainsay the determined desires of a bride-elect so lovely and beloved as Almeria at this time? Certainly not her bridegroom, especially when she condescended to explain to him, that as they were already provided with a country home in the future, it would be manifestly absurd for them to take a house elsewhere than in London, to which they could return as they found convenient whenever their home in prospect became a reality; for Almeria did not object to the idea of a country place filled with guests, provided she was not condemned to stay there longer than she wished, and in marrying Frederick Leslie she fully determined that in future she would be bound by no will but her own.

In acceding to his betrothed's wishes, contrary

to his own judgment, Frederick Leslie had no intention, or idea that she had, of entering into a gay and dissipated life. It never occurred to him that, brought up as he supposed her to have been, she could desire such, any more than himself, and knowing few people anywhere, and fewest of all in London, he found it impossible to provide for his wife the amount of society she privately craved, and soon taught him to understand was necessary to her happiness.

The present subject of difference between them, relating to the intimacy he disapproved of, arose in the following manner.

Almeria, paying a formal call on a recently made acquaintance, there met the lady to whom we have been introduced as yet by report only. The latter was struck by her beauty and that ever present air of haughty dissatisfaction which, while it repels all affection in the wise, has an unaccountable attraction for the foolish; deluding them with the idea that where so much apparent pride exists there must be some foundation for it in the superiority of the person displaying it; but

others understand the truth better, and are quite able to appreciate the cause, as arising either from an empty head, or from a spirit which has not yet learned the relative value of even earthly possessions; in both cases, there is little attraction to those who are better instructed, if not so well born, or so freely gifted with beauty or talents. This lady, however, of whom we speak, was one of the foolish ones, as we must consider all women who neglect their husbands and children for people who have no claim on their love or time; and perceiving in Almeria a most suitable exterior towards enhancing the attractions of her house, she requested an introduction, quickly followed by a formal call, and that again by an invitation to one of those *réunions* which every one thought so charming except her husband, who had to pay for them, and was bored to death by them if he was at home, but who more often than not absented himself on these perpetually recurring occasions.

Flattered by Lady Mary Belfield's kindness, as it appeared to them, the husband and wife to-

gether attended the first occasion of her inviting them, and for the first time in her life Almeria tasted the pleasures for which she had so long sighed, for in addition to her great beauty and perfect figure she possessed a lovely contralto voice and a cultivated talent for music, with a remarkable power of throwing into the former the intensity of feeling which as yet existed nowhere in her personal experience, except when her will was crossed, and then it was not quite of the kind which she interpreted with such apparent sincerity to the delighted audience in Lady Mary's drawing-room.

No wonder her head was soon turned, and her husband's patience soon tried by the unrepressed admiration expressed for her, and the complete engrossment of her attention by the men who swarmed round her on the occasions; for Lady Mary insisted on her dear Mrs. Leslie's presence, not at all oftener than she liked, but a great deal more frequently than her husband found amusing. When he remonstrated, however, at the frequency of these "charming" afternoons and evenings,

his wife eagerly suggested that he should let her go alone, giving him full and free permission to amuse himself elsewhere. This open preference of other society to his was too much for even the most determinedly blind husband to be indifferent to, and poor Mr. Leslie was bitterly hurt by it. He made no immediate reply at the time, but happening to meet that same afternoon a country friend, who invited him to dine with him *en garçon*, he excused himself on the plea of his engagement to accompany his wife.

"Oh, nonsense," replied Captain Boldero; "your wife, I am sure, will go alone once in a way, and you must be considerably changed if you like such old woman's amusements better than a dinner at the 'Rag.' Where is it?"

Frederick Leslie told him, and his face suddenly changed.

"What! that woman! Is your wife intimate with her?"

"Yes," replied the alarmed husband. "What's the matter? Do you know anything about her?"

"Why, she lives near us, when she is in the

country, and I suppose it is our ignorance, but our country ladies don't admire all that is said of her. I am advising you against myself, but if I were you I think I *would* go with my wife there. Lady Mary is rather wanting in discrimination sometimes regarding what amount of attention a married woman may safely receive, and her own husband has long ago ceased to care who pays *her* attentions, provided he is not expected to do so."

"She will see precious little more of my wife, if that is the case then, and I suspected something of the sort all along," answered his friend; and so the conversation dropped, and of course the Leslies kept their engagement that night, but after their return home the husband took courage to tell his wife what he had heard, and his wish that she should withdraw from the extreme intimacy which now existed between her and Lady Mary Belfield.

Almeria treated his representations at first with scornful indifference, and when he persisted in repeating them, with still more scornful anger;

and it was now nearly three weeks since any pretence of cordiality had existed on her part, for at that distance of time her husband had positively dared to refuse to accompany her to one of Lady Mary's "evenings," and had moreover plainly told her that although he did not forbid her to go alone, she must understand that she would do so contrary to his wish if she persisted in the intention she expressed to that effect. Nevertheless she did go twice, fearing rather her friend's displeasure than the diminution of that love in her husband which she was too secure of at present to value as it deserved; and he had not apparently resented her action; indeed, so far, while steadily refusing to accompany her to the house he disapproved of for her, he had sought in every possible way to supply her with society and amusement of a less deteriorating character, and bore with him at this moment an invitation, which he felt assured even his wilful wife could not regard without pleasure, to join an amateur musical society in getting up an operetta to be performed for some charitable

purpose, in a few weeks' time; but as we know, Almeria had given him no opportunity or encouragement to name the subject to her.

While Mr. Leslie consulted his father-in-law as he had proposed, the angry wife hastened to lay her grievances before her sister, naturally omitting her husband's reasons for seeking to withdraw her from an intimacy in which she had found for the first time the realisation of her girlish dreams of gaiety and amusement.

"But has not Frederick some reason for wishing this, which he would explain if you asked him?" said Ada, in some amazement, and greatly disturbed by her sister's vehement anger.

"Oh, as to that, I have no doubt he would give you a dozen if you cared to hear them, but I know too well the only real one, and it is one I will never yield to. It is sheer jealousy and nothing else. He can't bear to see another man show that he admires me, or to see that I care to speak to any man but himself, and he wants to shut me up only because he is afraid others will make me care less for him. But he is mistaken, and so he

will find. If one thing could make me hate a man more than another it would be this sort of jealous interference and watchfulness. However, I am not going to give in to his fancies much longer. I have refused three invitations to Lady Mary's on pretence of a bad cold, because he would not go with me, but if he means to be tyrannical he shall find that I can be obstinate."

Before Ada could reply to this tirade, the door opened and the Rector entered the room. He looked grave and disturbed, and sitting down by Almeria, who was hastily wiping the angry tears from her eyes, said with unusual seriousness—

"My love, be advised for once by your father. Your husband is right in his judgment, and fully alive to the difficulty of breaking off an intimacy without any open reason, and to your disappointment, but he shows his real love for you by seeking to preserve you from the dangers which sin places for the rich and great, in many a refined pleasure and luxurious drawing-room."

"*Sin*, papa!" cried Almeria, with flashing eyes, "how can Fred dare to say such things of

my friends? It is jealousy on his part, nothing else; and now he takes you in by talking of *sin*, because you are a clergyman. What sin, or danger of it, did he ever see in Lady Mary's drawing-room? And as to that stuff about her and her husband, it is not worth listening to. It is only before marriage that people think it so proper and delightful to be always together, or expect a woman to be bothered all day long with babies and tiresome children; but no one does it really, and I have no doubt, if the truth were known, that Lady Mary and her husband get on quite as well together as we do."

"That I should suppose very possible," said her father, almost sternly; "indeed, I should be surprised if, outwardly at least, she did not show him more respect than you have shown to-night to Frederick." Then seeing Almeria's colour rising, he added hastily, "But, my dear, I am not here to find fault; you and your husband must fight your own battles out your own way. What I want to say only, is to warn you that sin

does exist everywhere, and where you least expect it."

"But, papa," interrupted Almeria, "that is nonsense. Of course I know it is true in one way, but I assure you it has nothing whatever to do with this freak of Fred's."

"Is it not then a sin for women to forget their vows?" asked the Rector gravely, and looking anxiously at his daughter, who had evidently forgotten her's just now. "Is it no sin for them to neglect their husband's and children's happiness while they seek their own in vanity and admiration they have no right to, or to let immorality of all kinds run riot in their households because they will not fulfil their own duties as mistresses, or to turn their backs on the service of God because they are too much occupied or exhausted with the service of His enemy, the world, or"—and here her father spoke deliberately, and as if he specially desired to fix Almeria's attention—"to drown their sense of an unsatisfying life and of an awakening conscience by the use

of drugs, under the guise of medicines, with which they destroy both as surely and destructively as the frequenters of the commonest gin-palace ?"

Both girls looked at their father with horrified astonishment, for his anxiety to reconcile Almeria to her husband's rule, while she was still practically untouched by the dangers of the gay world into which she had lately entered, gave to the good Rector a certain solemnity of manner to which they were not accustomed; and Ada at least, almost expected to see a return to immediate obedience and affection in her sister towards her husband, so real and dreadful did these representations appear to her dutiful and well-balanced nature.

But Almeria, though sobered for a moment out of her anger, soon recovered her equanimity, and earnestly assured her father that such things were a gross exaggeration, and that Lady Mary had herself explained to her the state of her health, which *necessitated* her having recourse to medicines without which she could never get through the duties imposed on her by society and her own position in it.

"Exactly so," replied her father, "but are you already so blinded by the love of amusement yourself, as not to see the absurdity of placing the claims of society *before* those of home? Let her perform her home duties first, and however hard they may be, *they* will never oblige her to drug herself, as she now *complains* of being forced to do. But," added the Rector, "our business is not with her, it is you, my dear, who are our care, and I trust I have said enough to persuade you to listen to your husband and obey his wishes."

Almeria was silenced but not convinced. She, however, received her husband with less ungraciousness on his entrance soon after, and condescended to express the pleasure she could not help feeling, at the prospect of amusement and interest held out in the invitation he gave her, more especially as the occupation it would necessarily involve would relieve her of much of the difficulty she dreaded, in finding excuses for absenting herself from Lady Mary's house.

Frederick Leslie's hesitation in speaking of it

before the Rector and Ada arose only from the fact of the invitation being accompanied by an urgent request that Almeria would go early the next day to arrange with the other performers their respective parts and times for practice, but their guests' intentions had obviated any necessity for his wife to send an excuse, and even if it had not been so, we may be sure that her father and sister would have forwarded instead of hindered so opportune a diversion from the late subject of dispute.

So peace was restored outwardly in Almeria's manner to her husband, and cold as it always was at the best, it was all he asked for, or expected, contented, apparently, still if his beautiful wife suffered him to love and worship her without showing too plainly that he bored her with his unreturned devotion.

The next morning, earlier than they had intended, Mr. Harrington and Ada left, calling on their way to see Eleanor, and hear what prospect she had found of future happiness in her new and strange position.

CHAPTER XIV.

"DEAREST ADA,—I was so miserable for a week after you and my uncle left me, that I would not keep my promise of 'writing very soon;' for there was nothing to be gained by complaints, and I am not selfish enough yet to care to make others unhappy about me, because I am doleful myself; so I hope you have, according to the old-established rule among lazy correspondents, concluded that 'no news is good news.' I am quite sure it has been for you, but, for myself, I reserve my opinion, which inclines to a belief that I should have felt all the better for a good grumble.

"It would not be fair, however, to Uncle George if I were told so now, for really, Ada, he is the dearest, kindest old bachelor living, and if only

he did not live *here* I should be quite content to do my small utmost to make him happy, and to take care of him all the remaining days of his life; as it is, while I hate London, at least this part of it, more than I can say, I by no means dislike my elderly relation and guardian, and could quite forgive him for being the latter, if he would move from this dismal square.

"Uncle George is very different from papa in everything, and most of all in his appreciation of womankind. I remember so well how poor papa used to despise women, and say they had neither sense nor principle, but Uncle George seems to think just the contrary, and he is so polite to his horrid old cross housekeeper, that I quite sigh to think of the different value my poor dear mother was held at, although I know she did her utmost to be kind and forbearing.

"But I must not write on this subject, even to you, and I suppose one ought to try and forget everything connected with one's own parents which is not understandable or creditable, yet, when I see and hear what I do now, and

remember what I have seen and heard formerly, I cannot help asking myself, why is it that one brother is so good and contented with a nasty cross old woman, who makes him do what *she* likes under pretence of taking care of him, and that the other could not be happy or satisfied with a wife who only wished to please him? But you will say, as I do, what is the use of my asking myself anything?—perhaps, if I ever marry, I shall find out the reason of this among other things. Now I must describe my present life, and especially my two companions, for though I hate old Martin for her crossness to my uncle, I cannot help being amused by her, and you know of old, Ada, that I cannot get on without some one to talk to. In the first place, then, I have two very comfortable rooms to myself, and a young maid, whose chief business is to look after them and me. My bedroom is really very nice, and the drawing-room you saw when you came to say good-bye. It is much prettier though, now, Uncle George having given me a great many ornaments for it, and he has hired a lovely

piano for me, so I can strum away as much as I please; but I have not cared to do anything of this kind yet, for my thoughts are too full of what has been, and of the dear mother who made such a fuss about all I did; and here there is no one to listen or care whether I play ill or well; for Uncle George knows nothing of music. He always asks me every day, though, when I am going to play. I believe he thinks it is part of his duty to see that I do not waste my time, but, as yet, I have certainly been very idle. Uncle George himself is as busy as the day is long over his old books and curiosities, of which he has a most extraordinary collection, and it is the additions he is always making to his store of these, which is the grand cause for Mrs. Martin's airs and graces. She hates them as much as he likes them, and she is angry because she cannot make him do as she likes in this, as well as in everything else. I will give you a specimen of her rule and way of treating him.

"The other day he and I were going to some old museum where he hoped to pick up some

remains of the antediluvian creatures he is so fond of—at least, I suppose so, for there was nothing to be seen, I am sure, which could have come into existence later than the flood—when, just as we were leaving the house, Mrs. Martin appeared, and called out—

"'You'll please not to come in till four o'clock, sir'—it was then eleven. 'You've been making such a muddle and mess with them rubbishing things in your room, that it as much as ever I can do to tidy it at all to-day; and if you want anything hot for dinner you'd better send it in from the confectioner, for *I* shan't be able to cook you anything,' and away she flounced.

"Uncle George only said, in his little quick way—

"'Ah, well, well, Mrs. Martin; all right, my good creature—all right;' and when we got outside he went chattering on, half to satisfy himself, I suppose, and half to explain his meekness to me.

"'Very good woman, my dear; very good. Most faithful servant, but rather particular, you

see, rather particular. Poor woman, she is not very strong, too, I think; so we must have patience with her, you know—poor Mrs. Martin.'

"'Poor Uncle George,' *I* thought, but, as he did not seem to think any one was to be pitied except this old, spoiled tyrant, it seemed a pity to open his eyes to anything else; and he actually did stay out, I also, till the time he was told. However, it was all the better for me, as we went to see some pictures, and had a very good lunch at a confectioner's, from whence, also, Uncle George insisted on sending home something hot as he was desired; so I chose a pigeon pie, and the kind old man added a charlotte russe for my special benefit. When we got home at half-past four, Mrs. Martin met us with a most aggrieved and exhausted look, declaring that if Uncle George brought home any more mess she really must leave him, for it was as bad as children in the house to have such a litter as the arrangement and re-arrangement of his curiosities was always making. The poor old man got very red for a minute, then he went to

the cellaret in the dining-room, into which the old crosspatch had followed him, and poured her out a large glass of port wine, which he presented to her, saying—

"'Here, my good soul, drink this; it will do you good; you're not very strong, you see—not very strong—and you mustn't worry yourself, Mrs. Martin. Worry is very bad, very bad indeed. There's a good soul, don't worry.' And so he went on chattering, and she went on gulping down the wine, looking so ridiculously melancholy over it, that I left them, lest they should see me laughing.

"The next day I said to her—

"'Mrs. Martin, were you ever married?' for though Uncle George calls her 'Mrs.,' I have always doubted her claim to that title. She coloured furiously, and said—

"'Law, miss, what a question for a young lady to ask!'

"'Is it?' I said; 'it's just because I am a young lady, and not a married one, that I ask. The fact is, Mrs. Martin, I am rather puzzled

about marriage, and I want to collect all the information I can beforehand, so that I may manage my affairs better when I am married than most people seem to me to do.'

"'Well, to be sure,' exclaimed the old goody, 'you are a strange young lady. However, I can't help you much, miss, except to advise you to beware of the men. No, miss, I've never been married, though I was very near took in once, but I'm thankful to say my eyes was opened in time, and no man won't never have the chance now of being *my* master.'

"'But, Mrs. Martin,' I said, 'do please tell me how it happened that you just escaped in time. I should so like to know, and, what is more, I doubt very much if any man ever would have been *your* master; at least,' I added innocently, 'judging by the way in which Uncle George respects you.'

"Mrs. Martin's conscience here gave her, I imagine, rather a severe prick, for she coloured and coughed before answering.

"'Your uncle, miss, is a blessed man—and I

wouldn't leave him, not for all the husbands in the world.' This I could well believe. 'He's as innocent as a baby, bless you, and no more fit than one to do for hisself, and if I'm a bit cross at times 'tis for his good, poor dear, for he'd destroy his own property with his foolish games and messings, if I'd let him. But, as I said, and says again, and always shall say, he's a angel, if ever a man was, and deserves Sarah Martin's care, which he shall have while life permits;' and here she wiped her eyes, and went through a series of twitchings and grimaces which nearly upset me altogether. However, I was so anxious to hear her adventures in search of a husband, and their untimely result, that I managed to keep a grave face, and begged her again to give me the benefit of her experience. Here it is in her own words, and, aided, as it was, by the extraordinary gesticulations in which she indulges, and her long, lanky, bony figure, short skirt, prunella high-lows, and high-fly-away cap, it was nearly as good as a play to hear her.

"'Well, ye see, miss, I've always lived in good respectable service, and saved my money. None o' your fine gowns and trumpery for me. No, I always says to myself, "Sarah Martin, you 'ave a station, and a good one too, and you won't make it none the better for making believeas you don't belong to it." So I was never one to go a-gallivantin' about, wastin' money, and wearin' out shoes and character at the same time. I says, one at a time of every kind is enough, and if the men don't want me, I aint a-goin' to run about after them. Well, about two years afore I took up with your blessed uncle, miss, I was livin' with a lady in Suffolk, kind of housemaid and maid to her, and one day I had a letter. 'Twas from a man who signed hisself Joseph Carter, and I says to myself "I don't know no Joseph Carter; what's he up to, whoever he is?" So I reads the letter, and if you'll believe me, miss, 'twas a offer of marriage. He said as he remembered me well as a gal, when his pore wife was alive, and he'd been so 'appy in meetin' my

brother, and talkin' of me, and would I allow him to correspond with me? No, I says, I will not. I don't want no Joseph Carters a botherin' of me with letters about theirselves or their "poor wives," and I don't want to know nothin' neither; so he's welcome to enjoy hisself a talkin' of me with my brother, if he likes, but I don't waste my time a writin' to him. So I jest let his letter be, and took no notice. By and by comes another—he was afraid he had offended me, but since his pore wife died, and his children, all but one daughter were married, and she was engaged, he was that lonely, and he couldn't nohow take up with a stranger. Says I to myself, "I don't know nothing about the man," but by degress I remembered a friend of mine had married one of that name—though that wasn't any reason for me to be bothered with her husband. However, this second letter worrited me rather; so, though I didn't take no notice of it, I thought I'd just show the letters to my missis. Well, she laughed a bit, and then she says to me—

"'"Why, Sarah," she says, "I think you should answer the poor man—and if I were you, I'd just let him come and see me; then you'd know whether you'd like to correspond with him or not. Not," she says, "Sarah, that I'm a-wanting to part with you; far from it; but I wouldn't like to stand in your way of getting comfortably married."

"'"Married," I says, "I think I see myself married to any Joseph Carter, I don't know nothin' of. However," I says, "well, he may come if he likes, and show his foolish face."

"'"So I wrote and told him so—leastways I told him I hadn't no time for writin' letters about what was gone and done with, and if he'd got anything peticklar to say, he'd better come and say it."

"'About a week after down he comes, and missis gave me leave to go out with him for the day. He wasn't bad lookin', and he made hisself very agreeable, talkin' of old acquaintances, and my brother, but I couldn't help saying, as I'd never no idea before that they

were such friends, and, what's more, I wondered how he came to know so much about me and my places. Well, we'd a very nice dinner at the Railway Inn, and the waiter, he took us for a new married couple, and drank our 'ealth—and altogether we got friendly like; so I says to him, when I went home, as 'ow he might "come again if he liked." Well, the long and short of it was, miss, that at last I thought perhaps I might do worse nor marrying a respectable widower; so 'twas agreed, and he urged me mighty 'ard to marry him from my place, but I says to him, plain, "No, Joseph Carter, I don't go into no man's 'ouse to live till I've seen it with my own eyes." "It's a very nice 'ouse," he says, "and I should like to get everything put in order for you afore you see it." "And so you may," I says, "but as your lawful wife I do not go, until I've seen it first as Sarah Martin." Well, he didn't like it, but when he saw there was no good in talkin' he giv' in, and said as 'ow he and 'is daughter would be delighted to see me

whenever I'd like to come. "Very good," I says, "then I leave this next week, and I'll go to your 'ouse afore I go to my own home, and then I shan't 'ave no more moves till we're married." So 'twas settled, and, true to my word, down I went to Ramsgate, where my gentleman lived, and found 'im and 'is daughter, and pretty queer she looked at me; but she was very civil when she see I didn't take no 'count of 'er, and made believe as she was glad 'er father was a-goin' to get married again. "That's as it may be," says I. Well, the 'ouse itself wasn't not to say bad, though 'twas smaller than I expected, and Joseph Carter didn't look quite so spruce as I'd seen 'im afore, but, thinks I, I'll wait. They'd got a very tidy bit of supper, but I didn't think much of the table-cloth and the knifes and forks. Well, the next mornin' I was down afore the daughter 'd 'ad time to get ready, and nothin' was there for breakfast but the remains of the loaf we'd 'ad for supper. Presently a boy comes to the door, and she says to him, "Here, Jemmie, do you run and

get me a ha'porth of milk, and a couple of 'errings," and that was our brekfass, miss. I thinks to myself, Sarah Martin, you've never been used yet to take ha'porths o' milk, or send for your brekfass when you're ready to eat it, and you'd best not begin now. So I soon made up my mind what I'd do. My gentleman had to go out soon after brekfass, and his idle, empty-headed gal soon went after 'im, so I says to myself, "Now's my time"; and I upstairs and turned down all the beds, for my mind misgave me about Joseph Carter's comfortable 'ome, and, would you believe it, miss, there wasn't a decent mattress or blanket in the place. So thinks I, I'll look a little farther; so I opens my gentleman's drawers, and never a decent change could I see of anythin'—nothin' but odds and ends and rags, and stuff. So I just packed up the little box I 'ad with me, and put on my bonnet and shawl, and when I 'eard Mr. Carter come in, I went down, and I says to him, "Mr. Joseph Carter," I says, "I'm much obliged to you for your kind offer of a com-

fortable 'ome, but this one don't suit me, and so I'll wish you and your daughter a very good mornin'." So out I went, and got a boy to take my box and come right away. And that's 'ow, miss, I was very near deceived into marriage with a artful old dodger, who thought Sarah Martin's money saved in service would do nicely to sit him up again, and Sarah Martin herself to work for him—but thank the Lord I escaped, and no man but your blessed uncle has had the value of half-an-hour's work out of me from that day to this.'

"Here my uncle himself was heard summoning Mrs. Martin, which put an end to our conversation for the time.

"But, my dear Ada, I have run on to such a length about her, and her escape from Mr. Carter's toils, that I must put off all the rest I had to say to another time. Oh, Ada! I laugh and amuse myself the best way I can, but you don't know how heavy my heart is, and how I long for you and Charlton. I was interrupted here by a visit from Almeria. She says it is too

far for her to come often, but she is very anxious I should go and stay with her. Perhaps I shall soon. She looks very handsome and less discontented, but she did not say anything about Fred, except that he was well. Good-bye, dearest, dear Ada.

"Your ever loving, but not, as usual, contented cousin,

"ELEANOR."

CHAPTER XV.

HERE we must again pass over a year, during which Eleanor dutifully did her best to be happy and contented with her kind old guardian, but with very moderate success, while he on his part, finding her a constant source of amusement to himself, instead of the wrong he had feared, did *his* best to spoil her, by unlimited indulgence so far as his narrowed life permitted, but most of all by unlimited admiration of all she said and did. Now herein lay the danger to Eleanor's happiness in the future. She had not a particle of selfishness in her, therefore indiscriminate indulgence and praise had not the effect on her, as in Almeria's case, of causing her to seek and secure her own way to the prejudice of others; neither was she addicted to the various

pursuits dictated by female vanity, and fostered by idleness and selfishness. Her greatest faults were really the aggravation only of her greatest virtues, and arose from an excess of indifference to appearances, and a determined persistence in any path which commended itself to her conscience as right, joined with a tendency to despise all who indulged in anything which seemed to her weak, foolish, or wrong. All these things are excellent in moderation, as we know, but when carried to excess, especially in the young, they degenerate into a carelessness of outward proprieties worse in a woman than an excess of care for them, into a blind and dogged persistence in what, not conscience, but a conviction too hastily formed on insufficient grounds, dictates, to the injury of one honestly seeking to do right, and to an unseemly and unchristian contempt for all who act or think differently from our standard of right and wrong.

Eleanor had all her life been suffered to go her own way, and so far she had escaped marvellously from the usual effects of too great liberty. Her

father had either thought her too young or too insignificant to vent his irritable temperament on, and her mother, we have seen, had no thought but to indulge her to the utmost, determined that her child, at least in her home, should not be repressed by the want of that sympathy which she herself had made such intimate acquaintance with. In her guardian, again, Eleanor had found one who thoroughly believed in her, and there is nothing like this for encouraging any young girl in habits and ways most objectionable when established and adhered to, without regard to the opinions or wishes of those with whom our lot is cast. As yet all had gone easily with our heroine, as regards that freedom from daily worries and petty aggravations caused by differences of opinion in daily life, which had embittered her mother's life, and which were gradually sapping all the energy out of Frederick Leslie's bright and hopeful nature. But the future surely held in store for Eleanor, as for every other traveller through this world of instruction, such share of trial as should be necessary to prove, whether her will

were really given to choose the right and reject the evil, or whether she sought only, as so many do, that which was most likely to while away her own life smoothly and agreeably.

During the past year Eleanor paid only one visit of any length to Charlton Rectory, but it was a memorable one to her, and laid the first thought in her mind of a duty owed to the dead, which being carried into effect, wrought out for her the trial of her life. It was there that she encountered once more Sir John Mowbray, who was again staying in the neighbourhood which he had avoided ever since Almeria's marriage, not that he was broken-hearted on account of it, but with her had passed away his temporary interest, and there was nothing in the friends he had been visiting for his mother's sake, to make him care to revisit them for his own.

Lady Mowbray, however, had been persuaded to make a few weeks' stay with them the spring after the death of her friend Mrs. Castleton, and finding that Eleanor was at the Rectory, she again made her way over, escorted by her son,

and so charmed the daughter-in-law she still desired from a mistaken idea of her character, that she ventured by degrees to put before her what she was pleased to term "her dear mother's most anxious desire," which was that her daughter should marry Lady Mowbray's son. Now, as the reader is aware, Eleanor had heard of such a plan three years before, and after indulging the thoughtless amusement it evoked at the time, the whole thing disappeared from her recollection, driven away by her own active school-life, and shortly after by the commencement of her mother's last illness, which had prevented her from carrying into action the promised visit of herself and Eleanor to Dunmore Hall.

The Rector, seeing Lady Mowbray's evident desire to prosecute her acquaintance with his niece, had asked her to take up her abode with them for a few days, if she could content herself with their simple mode of living, and the good lady eagerly accepted the proposal, rightly concluding that she would do well to rivet the chains she was eager to fix, while Eleanor's heart was

yet sore for her mother's loss, and clung the more readily to any who had been her friends in life. Besides which, Sir John seemed not unwilling to accompany his mother, notwithstanding the absence of his former attraction, and though he showed much more liking for Ada than for Eleanor, yet as he was manifestly interested and amused by her originality and independence, his mother was more than satisfied, and gave herself up once again to pleasing expectations in the future, with Eleanor as her son's wife and her devoted daughter, while she herself would be safely located as commander-in-chief for the rest of her dowager life, for Lady Mowbray dreaded with a great and increasing dread the prospect of being consigned by the advent of a daughter-in-law, to the dower house designed for her use, should such a necessity arise, and let only on short leases in preparation for such an event.

Eleanor herself did not now ridicule the plan made for her, her respect for the mother no longer living, being greater than it had been during her life, and yet it weighed heavily on her heart, for

it seemed to her as if it deprived her of the right of youth to choose as the feelings dictate, and it seemed hard indeed to have all the charm and suspense of an ordinary girl's engagement destroyed for her by the knowledge of its having been sought and arranged by others less concerned in it than herself and Sir John. Yet, as she repeated fifty times a day to herself, after he and his mother were gone, there could be no real fear so long as *he* did not wish it, and he had certainly given her no reason to think that he did, or that he at all participated in the knowledge confided to her, for the second time, by his mother at their final interview, for she had had the grace to wait for this before placing poor Eleanor in a position of so much awkwardness and discomfort.

We see her now once more at home with her guardian, and not altogether sorry to find herself there; but just now she is sitting opposite to him at the breakfast-table, with an open letter in her hand, and a very disturbed and doubtful expression of countenance.

"Uncle George," she said at last, seeing that he had laid down his paper to demolish the huge slice of thick bread and butter which formed his own simple breakfast, "shall I be well off when I come of age?"

"Bless me, my dear, how you startled me," said the good man, wondering what strange freak Eleanor was pondering now, for she was always propounding something for him to explain, or proposing some impracticable scheme for him to carry out, but the latter simply for an amusement, be it understood. "Why, Eleanor," he continued, "I wonder what you are after now; some mischief, I know."

"No, uncle, I am quite in earnest, I really want to know exactly what my father left me, and for a very good reason."

"Why, really, my dear, really, let me see, I suppose it's all right telling you, but now take care, you know, and don't go and do anything foolish, you know—nothing foolish, Eleanor."

"I do believe you think I shall go and run into debt," she replied, laughing; "but now

seriously, Uncle George, do tell me, about how much a year do you think I shall have?"

"Well, well, my dear, let me see; I suppose I may tell you if I can remember. Why, I really think it is something like five hundred a year—quite a rich woman, Eleanor, eh?"

"Five hundred a year," repeated Eleanor slowly; "is not that a good deal for a woman, Uncle George?"

"Yes, yes, it is certainly," replied her uncle, looking very red and conscious, "but not too much, my dear, not too much; women very often make a better use of money than men."

"How?" enquired Eleanor, quite determined to discuss the subject to her heart's content.

"Why, you see, my dear, somehow, I don't know why it is, but certainly your sex are more disposed to spend your money on others, and we men, you know, are—well, I suppose I must say, rather more selfish."

"*You* are not selfish, whatever other men may be," responded his niece affectionately.

"No, my dear, no, perhaps not, perhaps not;

but you see I have no one but myself and poor Mrs. Martin, poor soul, to please; if I had a wife now, there is no knowing what a selfish, crabbed old fellow I should be to her."

"Indeed!" said Eleanor earnestly; "I only wish, Uncle George, that all men were like you, except in having a Mrs. Martin to worry you."

"Oh, Eleanor, fie, nonsense; very good soul, Mrs. Martin, very good, my dear; takes great care of me, keeps me in order. We want it, you know; all men want it."

"*What* do they want?" cried Eleanor eagerly; "do you mean that every man needs a tyrant in his wife or his housekeeper?"

"No, no, my dear, no tyrant; that won't do at at, but just some one, you know, to remind them that no one can afford to live quite for himself."

"Uncle George," said Eleanor, "I really believe you are as good as Mr. MacMahon, although you don't go to church as much as you ought."

"Ha! ha!" cried her uncle in high glee, "fancy Uncle George being compared to a

parson. No, no, Eleanor, you're a good little soul, and I'm very much obliged to you, my dear, but I don't pretend to know much about religion; wish I did, my dear, wish I did; but when I was young there wasn't much of that sort of thing. Only my mother, dear good soul, used to trouble her head about such things."

"But didn't she teach you?" inquired Eleanor, who had never before succeeded in getting her uncle on the subject of his early life, although it was one of special interest to her, as being likely to throw some light on her own father's.

"Well, my dear," said Uncle George, colouring and fidgeting under her eager gaze, "you see, my father was peculiar; very good man, no doubt, but rather harsh and strict; and my poor mother was very timid, poor soul, and altogether we had to get on the best way we could; but times are changed now, and I daresay I seem a very ignorant old fellow to you, my dear."

"You seem a very dear, good old uncle, as you are," replied Eleanor; "but if you would be dearer and better still, do please tell me why you

are not married, and why you think papa and mamma were not happy together."

"No, no, Eleanor, you must not think that. People don't know, they fancy things and make mistakes; don't think about them, my dear."

"But I must, because I am determined to find out and avoid the cause if ever I am married," cried his niece, becoming more determined the moment she had expressed her long-cherished wonder.

Uncle George was silent for a minute, then he said more gravely and connectedly than usual, "We all make mistakes, I suppose; your mother married the man she loved, and ought to have been happy; but sometimes I think it would have been better if there had been less love on her side, and more on his."

"Uncle George!" exclaimed Eleanor, "do you mean that my father did not love my mother when they were married?"

"No, no, my dear; I said nothing of the kind. Dear me! how difficult it is to talk to young

people who ask questions. It is very wrong of you, my dear, to think about your poor father and mother; let them be—let them be."

"Look here, Uncle George," replied our heroine; "it is all very well for you to say and think so, but you are an old man who will never marry, and I am a young girl who probably will. If I do, I want to be happy, and to make my husband happy. Poor dear mamma failed in both, and she always spoke of marriage as if it was the dismalest thing in the world, instead of the happiest, as all novels make out; at least, they are all about people who seem quite satisfied so that they can get married. So if you know anything about papa's and mamma's marriage which should be, as the old women say, 'a varning' to me, do be good and tell me. I am sure you don't want me to be as unhappy as my mother was, do you?"

During this long speech Uncle George had sat with his face persistently hidden behind his hand, and when Eleanor ceased speaking and evidently waited for his answer in earnest

anxiety, he yet delayed. At last he raised his head, and showed his niece eyes filled with tears, and features working with repressed emotion.

"My dear," he said, "perhaps you are right, but you have asked a painful question, and if I tell you anything I must tell you all. Eleanor, I was once foolish enough to love your mother, but I was too old and dull to please her, and *she* loved my younger brother, your father. He had had some trouble caused by extravagance, and—and—well, my dear, he was not steady as a young man, but he was handsome and attractive, and when he knew that your mother would have him if he asked her, he was tempted, partly by the thought that she was good and would help him to reform, and partly, I am afraid, my dear, by her money, to marry her." Here Eleanor uttered an exclamation of indignant surprise, but, not heeding her interruption, her uncle continued hastily, "No, no, my dear, don't think too badly of your father; he loved your mother, but not, Eleanor, not as I did, or would have done if she had let me, and, I don't know

how it was, but after they were married they seemed equally disappointed in each other. It was not for me, though, to try and help them. I was best out of the way, best out of the way."

"Oh," cried Eleanor, "how could my mother have been so blind as not to have chosen you? *You* would have helped *her*, for she was not fit to stand alone; even I could feel that."

"Never mind, my dear, never mind," answered her uncle, relapsing into his ordinary nervous mode of speech, out of which emotion had excited him during his last long address. "Such things always have been and always will be, and," he added with an attempt at jocoseness, which his face belied, "we old bachelors and old maids have to take up with something else, if we don't find some *one* else."

"Tell me," said Eleanor, "before we leave this subject, and I will never speak of it again, did my mother care nothing for you, or did she not know of your love?"

"She did know of it," replied her uncle, "and

she assured me of her deepest esteem and regard, but she had no love to give me."

"One thing more, uncle. Did my father object to her money being settled on her?"

"He did, my dear; but that was my doing really. I made her promise to insist on it, knowing his past habits, which she did not, or at least she seemed not to think of the many consequences."

"Thank you, Uncle George;" and Eleanor approached the old man, and gravely kissed him, so taking him by surprise that he coloured like a young girl, or rather as a young girl might be expected to do, when taken by surprise in a like fashion, and stammered out—

"Why, Eleanor, my dear, my dear, you must be careful, you must indeed, you will make me quite vain, my dear, quite vain."

"All the better," she answered, "you have more to be vain of than most people, for I know now who the mysterious friend was who gave another what he most wished for himself, and saved for my mother and me all her property, and

although neither thing made her happy, yet it was not your fault that it was so."

"But tell me, my dear," asked Uncle George, in his turn, "what mysterious friend do you mean?"

"Why," replied Eleanor, "once when I was quite a little girl, and papa was very angry with mamma, he said to her 'that he wished to heaven the man who had been so anxious to give her up to him had kept her himself,' and she said she wished she had been wise enough to marry where she respected, rather than where she loved."

"Poor Maria!" murmured Uncle George, "poor soul! But we must not speak any more of your father and mother, my dear; better not, better not. I think I will go and arrange my last new cabinet, my dear; it will do me good, do me good."

"Yes, uncle, and I will tell Mrs. Martin that if she worries you about the mess you make to-day, I will find some means of punishing her;" and true to her word Eleanor coaxed that worthy lady into an aggrieved silence only, over her master's delinquencies.

As she herself expressed it, "She was human, and must feel, but to please Miss Castleton once in a way, she wouldn't say nothin'."

Just as Uncle George was making his escape from the dining-room after his unusual agitation, greatly rejoicing that Eleanor, knowing the truth now, was not likely to propound any more awkward theories for him to discuss, she called him back, with—

"Oh dear! I've forgotten the very thing I wanted to say. Wait one moment, uncle. This letter is from Lady Mowbray; she wants me to spend next June with her. This is March, you know. Shall I go, or will you find it dull alone?"

"By no means, my dear; go certainly. You mustn't spoil me quite, Eleanor, you know. Mrs. Martin will take care of me. Better go, better go." and he vanished.

"Well," said Eleanor reflectively, as she seated herself in her pretty drawing-room, in which, however, she did not take the same amount of pride and interest that many young girls would have done, "I have learned one thing more this

morning about married people, and become more sure of my old principle being correct. It certainly is safer for a woman to marry a man she respects than one she loves, and I will not allow any one to persuade me to have my money tied up to myself, so that's settled," and she prepared to answer Lady Mowbrays' invitation by an acceptance, although she felt anything but desirous really of doing so, having a dim perception that she might be drifting into what might possibly assume an appearance of reality, greatly as she felt opposed to the scheme, now living, so far as she knew, only in the wishes of her mother's friend.

CHAPTER XVI.

JUNE has arrived, and with it Eleanor at Dunmore Hall, as Lady Mowbray's long-desired guest. The old lady and the young one are slowly traversing together the long avenue which leads not to the house, which is not approached by an avenue at all, but to the Italian garden immediately below the terrace on which the avenue opens at one end, and below which garden again rises a gentle slope of lawn and shrubs, near the end of which stands the little church of Dunmore. It is really a private chapel attached to the Hall in appearance, but actually the parish church of the tiny hamlet, wherein reside only the tradesmen and workmen employed on Sir John Mowbray's estate.

As the two pace on, enjoying the sweet scents

and lovely, though limited, landscape, Eleanor, more clearly than ever, realises her own special fitness for a country life, and feels the content which those who love it experience nowhere else as a bodily sensation, although they may be well acquainted with the spiritual satisfaction resulting from duty well done, which is attainable everywhere, and is really more allied to true happiness than that which greets us through our physical enjoyments, from however innocent a cause they may spring.

But just now our heroine was entirely engrossed by the delight with which this first experience of a perfect English home was surrounding her; for dearly as she had always loved Charlton, and contented as she would have been to spend her life there, it was impossible not to appreciate the superior charm of the cultivated pleasure-grounds before her. We hear often of Nature, both physical and material, as possessing more claim to admiration when "unadorned;" but this is as untrue in practice as are a great many of the theories which impress unpractical people—who

are never likely to put them to the proof—with a belief in their beauty and truth.

What Nature might have been, had man permitted her to keep her primal state in which her Maker pronounced her very good, is a subject with which we have no opportunity of acquaintance, though, even then, we must remember that our first parent was placed in the garden of the earth to dress it and to keep it. But since the rulers over this fair creation suffered it to fall through their own neglect, with themselves, under the dominion of that power for evil which we are all conscious of, but cannot explain, it is certain that both natural and personal beauty is by no means the better or more admirable for being left to take care of itself. Thus Eleanor, in the careless and unbecoming style in which she, as a rule, attired herself, was by no means a lovelier sight, at a short distance, than her elderly companion; whose neatly shod foot and well-stockinged ankle, handsome though plain dress, and bright if grey hair, under the natty bonnet cap, formed no *un*pleasant contrast to her

young companion's too large high-lows, rather loose stockings, tightly tied-in skirts of two ugly shades of a fashionable colour, and somewhat shabby hat—from under which her hair fell in rough loops, also fashionable, but by no means pretty.

To speak the truth, Lady Mowbray was just a trifle shocked at her elect daughter-in-law's inattention to the becoming in dress, and the utter absence in her of even sufficient vanity to make her care whether she were well or ill dressed. This was not altogether due to natural disposition. Eleanor had, on more than one occasion, heard her mother reproached for excessive expenditure on dress, and personal vanity as thus evidenced, and among her virtuous resolves for insuring her own exemption from like accusations, was one, acting upon which she discarded all interest in her attire, as a matter of taste and beauty, and contented herself with cleanliness and comfort, two very excellent and essential qualities in a young lady's dress, but by no means the only ones necessary for fitting her to

take her place successfully among her sister girls.

"Oh, Lady Mowbray," said Eleanor, after a pause, during which *she* had been drinking in the lovely scene around her, while her companion had been admiring the fit of her own boots, and pondering on the awkward necessity of instructing Eleanor in the duty of more attention to these details. "Oh, Lady Mowbray, how lovely this is; are you not very happy to have such a home?"

Now, considering the character of the lady she addressed, this was almost an insult; she living under the abiding impression that, while it was her mission to exist for the good of her fellow-creatures, she was herself far removed from any capability of enjoyment proceeding from temporal blessings, being completely devoted to the memory of the late Sir William Mowbray, under whose "expressed wishes" she calmly carried out the various plans for the good of her "neighbour," which commended themselves to her, though, as we have said before, not always to

the "neighbour." Dissembling the indignation which she would have felt it right to express to any one of less consequence to her than her future daughter-in-law, she raised her eyes from the contemplation of her own and Eleanor's feet to that of the sky, and, after a moment's apparent reflection, replied—

"Ah, my dear child, when you have had my experience of life, you will know how impossible it is for one, tried as I have been, to be happy anywhere or under any circumstances. I live for others, and rejoice in their happiness, but my own—"

Here the excellent lady broke off abruptly, possibly not knowing what statement to make concerning the whereabouts of her own felicity, sufficiently consistent with probability to obtain her companion's credence, or really being, as yet, uncertain where to give a hope of finding it, which might not be made use of to her disadvantage in the contest which she well knew would arise, sooner or later, between her and a daughter-in-law for the mastery; but of which,

she flattered herself, she had reduced the danger to a minimum as regarded the chance of her being worsted, should she succeed in her design of persuading Sir John that Eleanor was a desirable wife for him. In reply to the mournful but vague termination of her answer, Eleanor promptly rejoined—

"If you are only happy in making others happy, I should say you are one of the happiest people alive—there are so few who find their pleasure in that; but I think, even in my short life, I have learned that those few are the happiest."

Now this was much too literal a translation of Lady Mowbray's meaning to be agreeable. What she really meant to say was, that she alone rejoiced in the bliss of an ennobling sorrow, while others, less gifted and lower natured mortals, indulged in the common vulgarity of happiness and enjoyment of this world's good things; for that there are many of these for which we should thank God, and which it is our duty as well as privilege to

enjoy, none but an inexperienced ascetic will usually deny.

Lady Mowbray, therefore, paused before answering her too matter-of-fact young friend, and while still undecided what reply to make, by which she might reject all happiness, arising even from such an exalted source as that alluded to by Eleanor, both ladies were startled by the sound of voices approaching them from behind, and, turning round, beheld two young men following them, who soon came up, and proved to be the sons of a neighbouring country gentleman, whose only sister, unknown to Lady Mowbray, already bid fair to take the place destined by her for her present companion.

"Good morning, Lady Mowbray," said the elder of the two gentlemen, a dark, pleasant-looking fellow about eight and twenty years of age, "can you tell me where to find Sir John? We have been to the Hall, but the servant said he was out in the grounds—somewhere in this direction."

"My son is, I dare say, in consultation with

the head-gardener; there is a new tennis-ground in contemplation, I believe, and they are choosing a site for it," blandly replied Lady Mowbray.

"Thanks. Perhaps we may be allowed, then, to look about till we find him," and, raising his hat, an example followed by his brother, an insignificant-looking, fair youth, some years his junior, they passed on, leaving the two ladies to continue their stroll.

"Who is that gentleman?" enquired Eleanor rather eagerly, as soon as, indeed almost before, they were out of hearing.

"My love," answered her friend, "excuse my reminding you that no young lady should show any interest in any young man."

"Indeed, and why not, Lady Mowbray?" questioned Eleanor, with an amused look but heightened colour, for she was not insensible to the reproach, and her independent life and spirit had not prepared her to submit tamely to anything of the kind.

Lady Mowbray was decidedly shocked in more

ways than one, but she did not intend to offend Eleanor just yet, so she replied gently—

"Because, my dear, it is the privilege of our sex to be sought by men; and in my opinion it is unseemly for a woman to show any interest in one who has as yet shown none in her."

This was so far true as a rule, that it silenced Eleanor, although she was much disposed to assert her innocence of having broken it. But she also desired to keep the peace with her mother's friend, so she refrained from reply, and Lady Mowbray, fully satisfied thereby that she was duly impressed with this preparatory lesson, proceeded to state a few more of her views on the subject of womanly conduct, to which Eleanor did not attempt a reply, being fairly puzzled by the curious mixture of real refinement and absurd appreciation of self which displayed itself in Lady Mowbray's conversation, or rather soliloquy, for to this it was reduced by the silence of her companion, and by her own frequent references to the blessed past, in which her beloved husband still bore a very active share in his

wife's lively memory of former service, of which she had been the object.

While they were thus employed, greatly to her satisfaction, for she never wearied of the subject, but less so to her companion's, who could not help wearying very quickly of a dissertation on the departed virtues of an individual she knew nothing of, Sir John appeared, accompanied by his two friends, and joining them, the whole party returned together to the house for lunch; Sir John introducing the other gentlemen to Eleanor, as Captain and Mr. Herbert Dennis; and greatly to Lady Mowbray's disgust, the former instantly attached himself to Eleanor's side, and the two carried on a lively but perfectly formal conversation the rest of the way. On arriving, lunch was announced, and in the course of it the special object of the visitors transpired. It was to ask Sir John to assist them and a few other families to institute an Archery Club, meetings to be held every week, at alternate houses of the members, followed by a picnic collation, contributed by all, and laid out in a

tent bought by general subscription, the whole to conclude with an early, informal dance at the house of the member whose turn it was to throw open his grounds for the general benefit. Naturally, Sir John and Eleanor, the only two young people at the Hall, hailed the prospect with delight, but a glance at Lady Mowbray's face checked the latter in the expression of her pleasure, and Sir John knew better, by former experience, than to give vent to any opinion, however determined he might be in intending to carry it out, until he had first consulted his mother, and flattered her into apparently suggesting the very thing he desired and intended to do.

It was, however, agreed that the subject should be discussed, and that the next day Sir John and his mother's guest should ride over after lunch to Oatlands—Mr. Dennis's place—and announce the decision they had arrived at regarding the possibility of the scheme being carried out, and the arrangements necessary to ensure its success. Fortunately for the young people, it occurred to

Lady Mowbray's astute mind that these meetings would afford an admirable opportunity for the development and success of her own plans, for she had not forgotten how much easier it is for young people to fancy each other charming and desirable partners for life, while experiencing the enjoyments of shooting and dancing together, quite ignoring the fact that it is the opposite of our everyday character which we generally display on these occasions, and that it is the everyday one with which our business lies, and on which our happiness will depend when the summer season of flirting is over, and the less sunny and more changeable days of a more advanced season called marriage lend no false hues to the reality of the nature which we have made the companion of our own.

So Lady Mowbray graciously acceded to the desired plan for summer enjoyment, even proposing, as her son wished, that the first meeting of the new club should be held at Dunmore Hall; and soon all thoughts of more serious consequences were merged for the present in anxious delibera-

tions on targets, bows and arrows, dresses, hats, and everything else necessary to start such an important matter with becoming appointments, both as regarded those animated beings who were to be the actors, and the inanimate articles with and at which the former were to exercise their talents.

Eleanor shared to the full in the pleasant excitement. It relieved her of the discomfort she could not avoid feeling in Sir John's presence, by giving them a safe subject on which to talk, and by diverting Lady Mowbray's mind also from an idea which was daily becoming more unreal and disagreeable to the girl she wished her son to marry, and lastly, it threw Eleanor constantly into the society of Captain Dennis, whose open, hearty frankness of disposition charmed her in spite of Lady Mowbray's strictures, and soon opened her eyes to the knowledge that had *he* been Sir John Mowbray, she would have resented considerably less than she now did the premature attempt to provide her with a husband, of which she could not but feel her own mother had also

been guilty. Had she known, however, for how little of Lady Mowbray's plan, she, poor woman, had been answerable, or how completely selfish that plan was, Eleanor's history would have lost much of its outward interest, and she would have been taught by a different path that which all must learn, viz., that our life on earth is intended solely to teach us to choose between good and evil, and that it is happy for us if we make a right choice from our own will, not waiting to be driven into it by bitter experience of the suffering entailed by a wrong one.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHILE Eleanor was rejoicing in forgetfulness of all plans but those which were organised daily with a view to amusement, Sir John—who thought nothing of her except that she was a merry, amusing girl, free from young-ladyish tricks and affectations, and good-looking enough not to be unpleasant to look at, but not sufficiently so to his taste to claim a second thought—was quietly and unobtrusively winning the heart of Captain Dennis's sister Julia, a fair and pretty girl, but too fragile and delicate in reality, as well as in appearance, to be otherwise than a perpetual anxiety to her family. She, in her quiet and retiring nature, had suffered Sir John's hitherto unspoken love to take a deeper hold of her imagination than any one would

have believed, who saw her only as the timid, shrinking girl she appeared in public, too shy to be otherwise than cold, even had her lover been of a more impatient and fiery nature than he was. But although as yet he had made no formal offer of his hand, it was true that in fragile Julia Dennis the young man felt he had found that second self which, for a few weeks, he had once thought to find in Almeria Harrington. Yet, having once been mistaken, as he supposed, his naturally deliberate temper, or rather disposition, for temper is a different thing, added to the difficulties he foresaw in introducing a new mistress at Dunmore Hall, disposed him to put off from day to day the declaration which he was perpetually making with eyes and manner.

The fair lady in this case was, fortunately for him, as patient and trustful as Almeria had been the reverse, and was more than content as yet to enjoy the present, and to leave the future to take care of itself.

Thus the month for which Eleanor had been originally invited came to an end, and was

followed by another, and still she gladly remained, and Lady Mowbray obstinately persisted in regarding this willingness on her part as a proof of the growing attachment she desired, while in fact both young people were well aware that in each heart existed an attachment, which effectually set them at their ease with one another, and so helped unintentionally to deceive Lady Mowbray. But as in this world all things come to an end, both sad and pleasant, so the summer began to wane, and the days to shorten, and the archery meetings to become less delightful to the sitters by, whatever they might be to the principal actors in them, and finally a last day was fixed with which this happy summer season must terminate and take its place in the tomb of things only to be remembered. As Dunmore Hall had inaugurated its gaieties, so it was arranged that it should witness the last of them, and many were the hopes and fears brought into life by the preceding meetings, which looked to this final chance for either the happy confirmation or the extinction of their wishes. Both Sir John and

Captain Dennis had privately resolved to make use of this last opportunity for ascertaining the extent of that return which each fancied he perceived to his attachment in its object, and I suspect both Eleanor Castleton and Julia Dennis, in like manner, were not without private hopes that some such subject might be brought forward, during this their last summer gaiety.

As was only natural, the two girls had become fast friends. Eleanor admired the soft and youthful style of Julia's beauty, and was moreover intensely grateful to her for attracting from herself the attention of Sir John, having always a dim perception that his criticism of her was severe and by no means entirely complimentary, while Julia found in Eleanor's strong, independent will, and common-sense treatment of things, a mental prop most grateful to a girl of her own feeble and vacillating character.

But while these two were already on terms of the closest intimacy on all general subjects, neither had so far infringed on her friendly pre-

rogative as to dare to enter upon one which belonged only to each as a private and sacred possession. No word or look had ever intentionally passed between them, referring to anything in connection with the two gentlemen before named, which betrayed the presence of an idle curiosity in what should be the most jealously guarded secret of every truly refined girl, or of that want of refinement which leads a girl to make a joke of what is either a matter of the greatest consequence to all her future life, if true and earnest, or of which no one has a right to speak in connection with her, should it be a pretence from which she is doomed to suffer, or still more shamefully, one which she herself devises, for the amusement of her own vanity, and of her empty-headed companions.

So the day approached to which these four young hearts looked forward as the probable commencement of a still happier time than that which had preceded it, and of which it was intended to be the termination, but, ere it arrived,

all pleasant recollections of the summer's festivities were doomed to be destroyed and turned into a sad and regretful memory.

Within the grounds surrounding Julia Dennis's home was an old ruin standing on a small islet, surrounded by a moat filled with water, and approached by a draw-bridge. It was a lovely spot, and the favourite resort of the one daughter of the family. On the water, also, around the island, she was accustomed to amuse herself by rowing in a tiny boat with one of her brothers, and on rare occasions she had been known to go alone for a solitary row, but her courage and strength were both unequal to such a task in a general way.

A few days, however, before the last archery gathering and dance at Dunmore Hall, she had observed a flower growing among the long grass and weeds which bordered the outer edge of the moat, and, in her anxiety to secure and examine it, foolishly pushed off alone in her boat for the purpose of doing so. In reaching out of it to gather the coveted prize, she upset the tiny

vessel, and, in a moment, was buried beneath the water. One piercing cry only for help was all she could utter, and, though it was responded to, her brother who heard it and flew to her assistance, was only in time to bring to shore the insensible body of his sister, whose feeble hold on life was not sufficiently strong to enable her to survive the shock and immersion. She lived after it a few days only, and during those days the delirium of fever totally prevented even her nearest relations from holding with her any conversation; there was, therefore, no opportunity for Sir John to show more than the ordinary sympathy of a friend in the bereavement of the Dennis family, and yet his grief was as poignant for the time, as Eleanor alone guessed.

To her also it brought sudden and unexpected disappointment, for she and Everard Dennis did not meet again. The terrible loss to Mrs. Dennis for a time so unsettled her mind, as well as health, that it was found necessary to take her abroad for a considerable time, and the sad associations now connected with their former

happy home, made it, for the present, almost hateful to Mr. Dennis, whose devotion to his only daughter had been engrossing and almost idolatrous.

He determined, therefore, to let the place, which he accordingly did, and it being impossible, under the sad circumstances of his sister's death, for Captain Dennis to take any active steps to secure his own future happiness—even supposing this was, as Eleanor had fancied, connected with her—he returned, as he was obliged to do, to his regiment the day after Julia's funeral—that sorrowful event taking place on the very day which had been settled for the last happy gathering at Dunmore Hall.

Although the untimely end of the girl he *had* intended to seek as a wife had given Sir John no opportunity to claim a right to place himself as a mourner among her family, the close connection of friendship and intimacy made it allowable, if not to be expected, that he should join them uninvited, in laying with honour and love within the peaceful breast of earth the outer garment

by which they had hitherto known and loved the spirit now freed from its restraint.

And when he and Eleanor—who insisted for the first time on setting Lady Mowbray at defiance—joined the sorrowing family at the churchyard gate, they found that they were not the only members of their lately happy association who had been led to attend to her grave the young companion of their pleasant days and occupations. Although none, perhaps, felt the personal grief of Sir John, or the intense sympathy of Eleanor, all sorrowed in a less degree, and few were there who did not realise, in some measure, the mercy to themselves which had permitted this sudden seizure by the Destroying Angel, of one whom all felt to have been more ready for the summons than any other of their number.

And this was actually true; for while Julia Dennis had not been placed in a position which demanded that she should, like Adriana Harrington, live and work for those outside her home, as

well as in it, yet she had equal opportunities of proving that, whatever she had to do, she *would* do; and in fulfilling the daily unselfish acts demanded by duty, of even an only daughter in a luxurious home, she escaped the deteriorating effects of her position on a more selfish and less conscientious character; while in accepting the light but real burthen laid on her, by Him who bore the *whole* weight of the cross of suffering and self-renunciation, that we might bear our smaller portion of it with willing patience and perseverance, Julia Dennis grew silently in fitness for a happier and more certain state of existence; in which her weakness would never again distress the fragile body, nor her indecision the anxious soul which longed for more light, and which too often made her yield to those who, while superior to her in strength of will and self-assertion, had never yet had strength *enough* to give up that will, as she was always ready to do, and, in so doing, was already bearing easily the cross

which, in their own case, her more positive and wilful companions had refused, as yet, to lift.

While Sir John had gradually been attracted to her by her gentle beauty and sweetness, he had, of course, never thought for an instant of his own probable unfitness to make *her* as happy as he felt she could make him; but Julia Dennis was not destined to meet in marriage the disenchanting effects of everyday intercourse and familiarity, and to bear the pain of seeing that even the best of husbands views with different eyes the weaknesses and deficiencies of a *wife*, who, at a little distance, was to him perfection as a *girl*. And to one of Julia Dennis's sensitive temperament, such an experience would have been unusually painful; therefore, when those like her are removed from this suffering, struggling, disappointing world, surely we should not grieve over-much for our own loss, when we recall the trials which might have been theirs, and their certain sufferings under them.

So the grave received and held with un-

changing care and tenderness the form Sir John had hoped to take into his own, and the mourners met with tears for past enjoyment, in place of the merriment with which they had intended to celebrate its temporary cessation, and two, at least, that day, bore with them back to daily life the burthen of disappointed hope; one knowing that it was for ever, the other uncertain if it might not be so, and both unconsciously drawn together by the sympathy of a common loss. Neither Sir John nor Eleanor spoke on the subject of his disappointment, but he knew she saw and understood its extent, and in the greater softness which her manner displayed in consequence, *he* saw, for the first time, a glimpse of something not so foreign to his taste as was her usually lively and positive manner; while she also owned to herself that, in his present state of real and unaffected feeling, he was certainly not deserving of the title of "prig" which she had bestowed on him at a very early date of their acquaintance.

On her return to Dunmore Hall, Eleanor,

although prepared for some mark of Lady Mowbray's displeasure at her indifference to what she considered correct conduct, was considerably astonished at the extent to which she carried her annoyance, and much alarmed to hear that, in consequence of the distress her wilfulness had caused, it would be necessary for her hostess to remain in bed at least two days. But Sir John, who knew his mother better, only smiled at the news, and said kindly, in answer to Eleanor's eager explanations—

"Don't worry yourself, Miss Castleton, no one can please everybody, and *I* thank you for going, although my mother does not."

But here the reference to the ceremony which had been the cause of dispute overcame the man whose unspoken love must never be laid at the feet of her to whom it had been given. He yielded suddenly to the burst of grief which determination had, as yet, restrained, and, while Eleanor could not refrain from tears of unselfish sympathy, she felt, for the first time, that he had never been so manly or likable in her own eyes

as now, when he was overcome with natural grief for the loss of another woman.

When Lady Mowbray, the next day, requested to see her young guest, the latter was agreeably surprised to find that she made no reference to the subject of dissension between them, only referring to it by saying, after answering Eleanor's inquiries for her health, in a more desponding strain than usual—

"My son paid me a long visit in my room last evening, and I am rejoiced to find that *he*, at least, was comforted by your presence yesterday —let us say no more about it;" and she then proceeded to impress upon Eleanor the duty of not contending about trifles, or of bearing malice, and how unselfish she had always been in yielding up her own wishes to those of others, with many other excellent and improving remarks, accompanied by a succession of sighs and solitary tears, which escaped through the fingers closely pressed on her eyelids, and dripped first in one place and then in another, until her hearer became quite interested in a speculation

as to the inexhaustible nature of the fount from whence these gentle signs of a hidden grief were expressed, and the curious mental process which must be employed to cause them to be distilled so continuously and regularly. She had just counted forty-nine, and was wondering whether number fifty would drop on the pillow in a straight line with the outlet through which it had forced its way, or whether it would first, like some of its predecessors, take a quiet ramble over the light network, which was beginning to cloud the smooth fairness of what *had* been a lovely skin, when Lady Mowbray suddenly withdrew the sheltering hand, and gazed full at the young girl.

Something she saw in her face which assured her that her late friend's daughter was of a different and less pliant nature than her mother, and that the artificial moral atmosphere in which *she* lived would not long deceive the straightforward young spirit watching her with a half puzzled and wholly amused expression of coun-

tenance; on the other hand, Eleanor saw a gleam of the true tyrant in the compressed lip and sudden flash which her own face had drawn forth, and was not deluded by the soft tones which professed their owner to be fatigued, and bid her guest a courteous good morning. As the door closed on the latter, Lady Mowbray *said gently* to herself—

"That dear girl needs a mother's guidance. I must supply it for her beloved mother's sake." But her thoughts angrily declared, "I will teach her to laugh at me." They dared not, however, avow themselves honestly even to their owner, who would have repudiated with horror such unchristian and unladylike sentiments; while Eleanor, as she marched out of the room, feeling that she had really been dismissed for a misdemeanour, did not scruple to utter boldly *her* thoughts to the effect that "Lady Mowbray was a mass of affectation and pretence." And so she was, but although she knew it herself in a way, she deceived herself a good deal

more than any one else, so that her little make-believes did not injure her neighbours, while they had the sense to take them at their right value. With her husband it had been different; but his troubles, poor man, were over, so that Lady Mowbray was now really comparatively harmless, though very troublesome. After this little affair, in which the elder lady had certainly been worsted, she and her young friend did not get on quite so comfortably together, and Lady Mowbray began to repent of her generous offer of her son to a young girl who was already not by any means showing that docility of spirit which she looked for in a daughter-in-law, and which she would have found in Julia Dennis but never in Eleanor Castleton.

When, after a few more days, the latter proposed returning to her uncle, Lady Mowbray made no objection, neither did she again allude to her son, as she had before done. So Eleanor departed, with many pretended regrets on her hostess's part, and thanks on her own for what,

but for its sad ending, would have been a most happy summer to her—and, strange to say, it was Sir John, and not his mother, who *really* felt regret at seeing her go, while he and his sorrow alone were in *her* thoughts as she drove away from Dunmore Hall.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Eleanor reached her uncle's house, she was met at the door by Mrs. Martin, who with swollen eyes and reddened cheeks, informed her that her master had been taken suddenly ill that morning with some kind of fit, and had just been pronounced by his medical man to be unlikely to recover for more than a few hours; "and," added his faithful though crabbed old servant, "what we shall do without him, is more than I can say." Yes, Mrs. Martin, and it is more than any of us can say of the future, under any circumstances, even with much wiser heads than your's. The pity is, that we are always being taught, and yet never really learn the truth of this lesson, because we do not like to own our dependence on a wiser mind and more

complete knowledge than our own; so, while we are perpetually experiencing the overturn of our most anxiously laid schemes, or the disappointment brought by them, when we are suffered to bring them into a real existence, yet we never get any farther in perfecting ourselves in the fact, that we are not intended to provide for ourselves and our happiness in the future, *save by doing rightly and justly in the present;* this is our share of work, but few of us do it and reap the solid advantages in a present security and future hope, because we persist in providing for an imaginary future, spending upon that—which never comes as we expect it—the time and care which our present needs, and not receiving, fails, and adds to our anxieties in the future.

Mrs. Martin, therefore, while no wiser than her fellow human beings, was certainly not more foolish, and though she was already bewailing herself as regarded the future, she did not on that account neglect her duty in the present, for she devoted herself to the duties of a sick nurse, with a tenderness and softness of voice and

manner quite astonishing to those who had as yet only known her as "Uncle George's tyrannical housekeeper."

And, as usual, things fell out differently from what was expected of them. Uncle George did not die, but he recovered only to lead the life of an invalid in body, as regarded his strength—for he suffered no pain—and of a child in mind; and Sarah Martin's future, for many years, was, not life without her master, a trial she would probably soon have outlived, as a trial, but the unlooked-for and far greater one of life with him, as his hourly attendant and nurse. Yet she took up her work, and performed it as thoroughly and conscientiously for him as she had once fought her own battle against, and delivered herself from, the snares of an intended but undesirable husband.

Nothing came amiss to her that her master wished or did, from the moment that she felt his complete dependence on her. He was as a child in her formerly hard but faithful hands, and as such she gave him the forbearance and patience due to one. Harsh and tyrannical to others who

came under her direction, to him she was gentle and sympathising, even on the long-disputed point of his beloved curiosities, in the examination of and addition to which consisted more than ever his sole pleasure; and no greater proof of Mrs. Martin's real attachment and faithfulness to him could be found than in the patience with which she not only put up with any amount of litter, but in the pains she took to procure for him, whenever she gave herself the opportunity through the weekly indulgence she took of one walk, some little addition to his precious but not intrinsically valuable store of odds and ends.

Eleanor's life was again changed by her uncle's incapacity to act any longer as her guardian, and while really grieved to be separated from him, she yet hailed with delight the prospect of a home with Ada and her father at Charlton Rectory, and finally took up her abode there, as soon as her Uncle George was sufficiently recovered to be left to the care and companionship of the faithful Mrs. Martin.

But her stay was a short one. Sir John Mow-

bray had become as restless and unhappy as he had hitherto been calmly contented, and, latterly, hopeful and expectant. His mother's weaknesses and petty tyrannies now wearied and worried him, where formerly they had made little impression on him.

In her ignorance of his love for the daughter of Mr. Dennis, she was perpetually wounding his feelings by frequent references to the necessity of his marriage, and cunningly contrived questions, by which she sought to ascertain how far he had or had not entered into her quondam plans for himself and Eleanor; and in his grief, which was all the greater for its suppression, her son's heart began to take refuge from the selfish fidgetiness of his mother, in the thought of the unselfish sympathy of the girl who alone appreciated the cause of his sorrow, and the reality and magnitude of his loss.

He was beginning to see Lady Mowbray's interested motive in selecting her friend's daughter as a desirable daughter-in-law, for he was well aware that no one else of his acquaint-

ance would consent to suffer his mother to retain a place in his household, even if he himself wished it, of which he began to be doubtful, and life alone with her began to be unendurable to him. He would have gone abroad, but for the solitary life to which his absence would have condemned his mother, and he was a pre-eminently dutiful son, so that it was not to him as it would be to many others, a matter of indifference to know that his one parent was left alone and neglected. But he was very unhappy and lonely himself, and when he heard that Eleanor Castleton had left her London home and returned to Charlton, it dawned upon him pleasantly that he might, without much impropriety, propose himself to the Rector as a visitor, under pretence of being again in his neighbourhood, while at the same time he excused himself for paying only a flying visit to the friends who furnished him with this excuse, on the plea of being engaged to the inmates of Charlton Rectory.

It must not be supposed that the young man had either forgotten the attraction which he had

perceived to exist between his friend Captain Dennis and Eleanor, or that he sought the society of the latter with any idea of asking her to take the place left vacant by Julia Dennis's removal from the possibility of filling it. He simply felt worried, unhappy, and lonely, and Eleanor's friendship with his lost love, and knowledge of his attachment, drew him to seek her society as the one person who could understand and sympathise with him in his present state of feeling. So, hearing from the good-natured Rector that he would be a welcome guest for as long as he pleased, Sir John informed his mother that he had business in London, and that as it would oblige him to remain away some little time, he should during his absence run down and see both their mutual friends in the neighbourhood of Charlton, and the Harringtons themselves.

The day arrived on which he was expected by the latter family, and while Ada and her cook were disturbed by the delay of dinner, which had been ordered for seven, it being now more than

half an hour after that time, without any sign of the approaching guest, Eleanor fidgeted restlessly from one part of the room to another, striving to subdue the agitation so foreign to her nature, at the mere prospect of again seeing a friend of the man whose kindly, honest nature had first made her feel that it might possibly be easy to love as well as respect a husband, without danger of being in consequence disappointed in marriage.

The time, however, wore on, and in consideration for her father, whose usual dinner hour was the old-fashioned six o'clock, Ada insisted on the meal being served without further delay, when at eight there was still no indication of Sir John's arrival, and accordingly the three sat down with better appetites than they would have had, could they have known that their expected guest was at the same time lying not a hundred yards from their gate, insensible, and with a broken arm.

But although they were unaware of this fact when they sat down to the dinner table, they

learned it long before they were prepared to leave it with the ordinary satisfaction of ordinary diners. A violent pull at the front-door bell made them all start up, exclaiming with various degrees of animation on the silent approach and arrival of their unpunctual guest. But hearing no sound of entering feet, and only a murmured colloquy between the servant at the door and the impatient ringer of the bell, the Rector opened the intervening door of the dining-room and soon ascertained that the village doctor and not Sir John Mowbray was his visitor, and that the object of the former was to tell him that the latter was lying in the disabled condition before described, at the entrance of the lane leading to the Rectory from the village.

It appeared subsequently, that the friends from whose house Sir John was coming, had insisted on providing him with a horse for his use during his stay at Charlton, which was within easy reach of a good pack of foxhounds; and having despatched his "traps" early in the afternoon to their destination, where they arrived and were

safely ensconced in the room prepared for their proprietor, that gentleman elected to ride over later in the day, thus conveying himself and his animal without any extra assistance.

Unfortunately, finding that he had been longer on the road, or had started later than he intended, he attempted a short cut across a piece of waste land or common, with which he was unacquainted, but which rejoiced in all kinds of inequalities, and just as he was congratulating himself on having got safely over it, his horse, putting his foot into a hole, fell with and partly on him, and very ungenerously left his rider to the dilemma in which he had placed him, trotting off to his own stable, or rather in search of it, as soon as he had succeeded in scrambling to his feet.

Here then the unlucky rider lay, stunned and disabled, until he was discovered by the person of all others whose assistance was most necessary to him, the village doctor, as he was returning from a professional round; and he, as we have seen, guessing who the injured man was, immediately gave information concerning him at the Rectory,

and procuring needful help, Sir John was removed as a helpless invalid to the room which had been intended for him under very different circumstances.

The clerk's wife, a former nurse and housekeeper in the family, was soon installed as his attendant, and thus it came to pass that he spent not one or two weeks, but nearly two months, under the same roof with Eleanor, who for the last half of that time was his constant and sympathising companion. Lady Mowbray had been persuaded, with much difficulty, to stay at Dunmore Hall, and content herself with the knowledge that her son was recovering under the care of the Rector and his belongings, but she did consent, and thereby the inmates of the Rectory were released from much extra trouble, and those of Dunmore Hall and parish were proportionately sufferers. For Lady Mowbray, being debarred from participating in the excitement consequent upon her son being reduced to a state of comparative helplessness, in which she might have exercised over him a loving but most

tyrannical rule, turned her energies to the task, delightful to her at all times, of correcting the delinquencies of the people belonging to his estate, and with whom he had seldom encouraged his mother's interference of late years. So she wisely made the most of the present opportunity —what a pity it is that we are not all equally wise in a better cause!—and corrected, reformed, advised, and insisted on such various and complicated principles, that half of those who had to listen to, if not to obey her, were fain to admit their incapacity to keep pace with her greedy pursuit of, and anxiety for, reform, hoping thus to flatter her into a relaxation of it, by a profession of inferior understanding whereby to execute her suggestions, while the other half, who had no responsibilities but to do as they were told, and keep their own opinions in abeyance, were driven to the verge of desperation by the difficulties they encountered, in satisfying the requirements and eluding the vigilance of their self-constituted guardian, in their master's absence; and it was with heartfelt rejoicing that a rumour was re-

ceived and quickly spread, to the effect not only that the latter was sufficiently recovered to be likely to return to the Hall for Christmas, but that there was a possibility of his being accompanied by a young lady already known to them, and who was likely sooner or later to be the reigning Lady Mowbray in place of the one under whose sovereignty they had long been conscious of an undue restraint and an exacting supervision.

But we must now return a little, and inform ourselves of those intermediate events which led to such a rumour, so far as Eleanor was concerned, with the probable truth of it.

Naturally, Lady Mowbray, who had a remarkable talent at all times for correspondence on anything or nothing, as the case might be, kept both Ada and Eleanor busy in this particular for many days and weeks after her son's accident, insisting on the minute particulars of his state, and of everything referring to him, for her daily refreshment and comfort. In return, it is only fair to say that she gave fully as much as she

demanded, and not a morning passed without bringing to some inmate of the Rectory pages of closely written matter, which were as remarkable for their voluminousness of diction as for the meagreness of the thought and information retailed in them, as a rule. But one day there arrived for Eleanor one of these missives, which, instead of handing on to her cousin, and reading aloud to their invalid guest, she quietly relegated to her pocket without remark, studying it later in the day in the solitude of her own room, with pale face and lips compressed to keep back the utterance of feelings which she knew to be as useless as the feelings themselves to have been indulged in vain.

This was that portion of Lady Mowbray's letter which occasioned its consignment to Eleanor's pocket, instead of the accustomed round of the good lady's epistles :—

"You doubtless, my dear Eleanor, remember my son's friend, Captain Everard Dennis, and if so, will be interested to know that he has just sailed for India, having effected an exchange for

the purpose with a friend, who, as a married man, specially desired to remain on a home station. The truth is, I think, that he, like his poor father and mother, has been so overwhelmed with grief since his sister's melancholy end, that he requires complete change, and, seeing this, when he called on me, on the occasion of his return here to transact some business for his father, I felt it to be my duty to urge upon him the necessity of rousing and of interesting himself in the affairs of everyday life. Among other things, of course, we spoke much of my son and his present condition, and this proved the wisdom of my advice to Captain Dennis to think more of other people's affairs and less of his own troubles, which are common to us all, for he grew so excited and eager in his enquiries about Sir John, and then asked so kindly after you, that at last, my dear, I felt it to be only right and friendly to the poor young man to give him a hint of what you know has often been in my own thoughts, as well as in your beloved mother's last wishes, and you have no idea how cheered and interested he

seemed. So much so, indeed, that I was obliged to beg him to keep my little confidences quite to himself at present, for fear of annoying you, my dear, or my son, for, as I always say, nothing is so likely to hinder a match as to speak of it beforehand, and no young girl should ever permit herself to be made a topic for conversation in connection with any young man; but, of course, my love, this is quite a different matter between you and me, and I am sure if you had seen the excitement and interest of Captain Dennis, you would have been quite pleased. He was quite grateful, too, poor fellow, for being roused out of his morbid grief, for he said to me when he went away, 'I am much indebted to you, Lady Mowbray, for admitting me into your confidence, and both your son and Miss Castleton may depend on my feeling the greatest interest in their so carefully concealed plans'—which was very nice of him, although I don't quite see why he should think you had concealed anything, for, of course, you know, my dear, there was nothing to conceal. However, I felt quite glad to see poor Captain

Dennis so cheered and enlivened, and you see the consequence has been that he has decided to secure a thorough change, and if only his liver will hold out against the climate of India, I have no doubt he will return a different man."

Eleanor's feelings may be imagined, when she had grasped the fact that Captain Dennis had left her, evidently believing her to be engaged to Sir John, not only without any explanation of his own sentiments, but with the intention of putting them aside for good; and all this had been done by the same old lady who was not certain from one day to another as to what she really desired or expected her son to do, in the matter of marrying. For a short time Eleanor felt as if she could have inflicted the direst vengeance on Lady Mowbray's foolish old head, and her wrath raged alternately against her selfish folly and Captain Dennis's weak belief in such "a foolish old twaddler's chattering." But after a time her angry feelings were quenched in showers of passionate tears, from which she roused herself to remember that this man had

given her no right either to blame or love him. She knew he had been misled, and she believed he would suffer in consequence as she was now doing, but gradually a conviction came over her that all these things were not chance accidents, but part of an inevitable train of circumstances intended to lead her in a certain path towards a certain end, and that end she began to see was marriage with Sir John Mowbray; for she was conscious also that lately he had both regarded and treated her differently from the way in which she had been accustomed to regard herself as an object in his eyes, and so she felt the net gradually closing around her, from which she knew not how to escape without ignoring her dead mother's wishes, as she supposed, and offending the only friends between whom and that mother there had been any confidence concerning herself.

Not a word did our poor heroine say of the letter in her pocket to Ada; but a few days after, Sir John himself heard from his mother of his friend's departure for India, and greatly as he

was puzzled to reconcile this with the intentions he had imagined him to have regarding Eleanor, he was not altogether displeased at the fact, and at the assurance conveyed by it, that if he had ever meant to seek her as a wife he had for some reason now come to a different determination. It left Sir John more at liberty to seek and avail himself of Eleanor's sympathising companionship, without the fear of losing it, or of witnessing the distraction of her thoughts from himself by an object of deeper interest; and, therefore, *he* was satisfied; while it did not appear to him a matter of equal importance what Eleanor's thoughts might have been regarding Captain Dennis. It was sufficient that she had not had, and was now not likely to have, the chance of expressing her feelings or wishes at all, and Sir John shared the common but not very wise belief that the best consolation for a woman who has been disappointed by one man, whom she does love, is for her to undertake the less pleasing task of devoting herself to the care of the happiness of one whom she does not love.

Whatever our heroine felt, she made no sign; for she possessed to a faulty degree that pride which is indomitable, except by convictions of duty, and in forming these convictions also, she refused, as a rule, all advice or remonstrance; thus converting one of the greatest virtues into a hurtful fault, almost as injurious in its effects as the weakness of want of principle.

She, therefore, took counsel only with herself, and this is what her unenlightened conscience said to her—"Everard Dennis could never have really cared for you, or he would not have been satisfied to believe so readily in such a ridiculous and unlikely report. Do not think of him any more; he is not worth it, and it is fortunate you have been stopped before you had allowed yourself to care overmuch for him. Sir John Mowbray does not adore you as he did Julia Dennis, but he trusts and esteems you, and as you don't love him at all, it is of less consequence that he is not really in love with you. But you respect him thoroughly, and trust and respect are far safer feelings than admiration and love on which

to marry. In fact, the prospect before you is exactly what your previous experience of marriage has taught you to desire. With Captain Dennis it might have been a repetition of your parents' unhappiness, except that you would never have submitted like your mother, but with Sir John you will both jog quietly on, expecting little because each of you gives little, and knowing each other's previous history, each will extend to the other the patience and sympathy demanded." So Eleanor pondered, and all things around and within combined to quiet down her impulsive and careless nature, till Sir John began to wonder how it was that he had despised her real beauty, and misunderstood her character, looking on her, as he had done up to this time, as an unformed girl, in both ways. Whereas now she appeared to him—what she really was—unmatured certainly in figure and versatile in expression; but he began to perceive that she was a girl full of capabilities, needing only age and life to bring them to perfection, and to make of her a noble specimen of a woman, both in outward beauty

and inward goodness. She was, too, in her perfect honesty and fearless sincerity of purpose, so refreshing a contrast to his well-meaning but intensely selfish and egotistical mother, that, now his idol was taken from him, he could not help owning to himself how hard his life would seem without the sense of sympathy and comfort which her presence brought him; and day by day he, too, listened to the advice given him by an inward monitor, but as it spoke on behalf of self only, and not, as in Eleanor's case, from a desire to do what was right, and to avoid evil in a state which should be ruled by good, I cannot give it quite the same title as that by which I think our heroine's counsellor might fairly claim to be called.

But whatever was the name of the voice by which Sir John Mowbray was advised, this is what it said—

"Your love is dead, and she who possessed it has no further need of it. You cannot revive it for Eleanor, and as you feel pretty sure she preferred Captain Dennis to you, as you did his

sister to her, it is a comfort to know that she could not expect or wish for much from you. But she is the only girl, you know now, at all likely to make you reconciled to life again at Dunmore Hall, and she is sure to be a good wife —because she has honest principles of right and wrong, sympathy with you in your great loss, and a sincerity which will make her carry out anything she undertakes. Then your mother likes her, or did; and it is such a chance how she would admit any daughter-in-law, that it would be a great thing to give her one so bound to her by ties of friendship in the past. To be sure, Eleanor is not as much of a refined lady in her fashion of dress and manner as you should like your wife to be, but you will take care how she dresses, and it will be rather pleasant, than not, to see her gradually growing, under your guidance, in all that is most necessary in a wife for the comfort and pleasure of a husband—besides, she has been so much softer and quieter in manner lately, that you need anticipate very little trouble in making her what you wish. As

to Captain Dennis, out of sight is out of mind, with a woman, and all good women are—or ought to be—happy in making others so. Your own mother was an exception, and for this very reason proves the rule that the happiness of a woman, who is worth anything, consists in devoting herself to her husband, and to his wishes; and never were two women so opposite in character as your mother and this girl."

So this inward counsellor murmured on, and to such good purpose, that, when at last Sir John Mowbray returned to Dunmore Hall, it was with the implied promise of Eleanor Castleton to become his wife early in the ensuing spring; and one bright morning in the beginning of April saw them made man and wife by the good Rector, while Ada, in her capacity of bridesmaid, knew not whether to rejoice that her orphan cousin had found a home in which to try her unfledged powers as a wife, or to regret in her the absence towards Sir John of such love as she herself had once known, and which was, even now, unfor-

gotten. But Eleanor had throughout been strangely reticent and reserved. She had scrupulously complied with all her lover's (?) wishes, had undergone torments at the hands of dressmakers and milliners, had obstinately refused to allow her fortune, or any portion of it, to be secured to herself for her own separate use, and declined to join in, or even to listen to, Almeria's sarcastic speeches on husbands and the stupidity of marriage, or to profit by her advice how to get all the advantage possible out of such a wretched state of bondage, without sacrificing yourself to the wishes of an unsympathising husband. "Selfish" she *would* have added, but even Almeria durst not apply that term to the only man of whom she had had experience as a "lord and master," so, for very shame, it was left unsaid. Yet, truly, her weariness and discontent in the society of the one she owned, and her evident relief in his absence, were not encouraging symptoms of the happiness to be expected in married life.

But Eleanor remembered that single life had

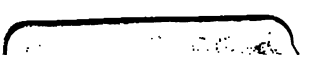
never satisfied Almeria any better than, if so well as, her present state, and she put aside all fears for her future, with the assuring thought that she and Sir John had a sincere respect and quiet affection for each other, which were far less likely to wear out than any other feelings, unless, indeed—which she did not anticipate—marriage were to effect a complete revolution of character in one or both of them. And this is exactly what it does, nine times out of ten, only the principal actors—in the same proportion—are unaware of the fact, and those few who recognise it as a truth are, for the most part, ignorant how to set matters straight, so as to secure in marriage a portion, at any rate, of the bliss of the time preceding it.

Now Eleanor must not be supposed to have been either an unloving or unwilling bride. On the contrary, she sincerely loved, for his trust in her, and respected for his many good qualities, the man to whom she gave herself as a life companion. She grew to believe

that his love was, if less openly shown, of more value than Captain Dennis's easily diverted fancy, and she had no jealousy of the girl whom death had removed from his more passionate pursuit; so, although a composed and unexcited bride, she was not an unhappy one, and the absence of all real and excited feeling gave to her just that self-contained and dignified demeanour which Sir John admired, and congratulated himself on perceiving, for the first time, in Eleanor, on the occasion of her becoming Lady Mowbray.

He, on his part, had become as much attached to her as he ever expected to be to any one as a wife, and yet it must be owned that his love was given more to what he thought she promised to be than to what she actually was—but of this he was himself quite ignorant.

Almeria was at first unwilling to be present at a marriage so disagreeable to her in many ways from past memories, but pride prevailed over disappointed feelings, and when she met Sir John the day before the wedding, with well-assumed

indifference, she was relieved, for the moment, to see that he had apparently forgotten the circumstances connected with their acquaintance, on which she had built hopes which her own impatience destroyed, and that to him she was simply Eleanor's cousin, Mrs. Leslie. So the wedding bells pealed forth as sadly as usual—what is more divinely sad?—and two more souls made one, started on that journey which first opens their eyes to the knowledge of how completely they are two.

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